JIDAIGEKI COMIC SERIES
時代劇画

柳生連也武芸帖 2

YAGYURENYA BUGEICHO

時代劇シリーズ
HISTORY OF JAPAN
COMIC
SPECIAL SELECTION

とみ新蔵

SPコミックス

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YAGYU RENYA, LEGEND OF THE SWORD MASTER

とみ新蔵

SHINZOU TOMI

2

YAGYU RENYA
LEGEND OF THE SWORD MASTER

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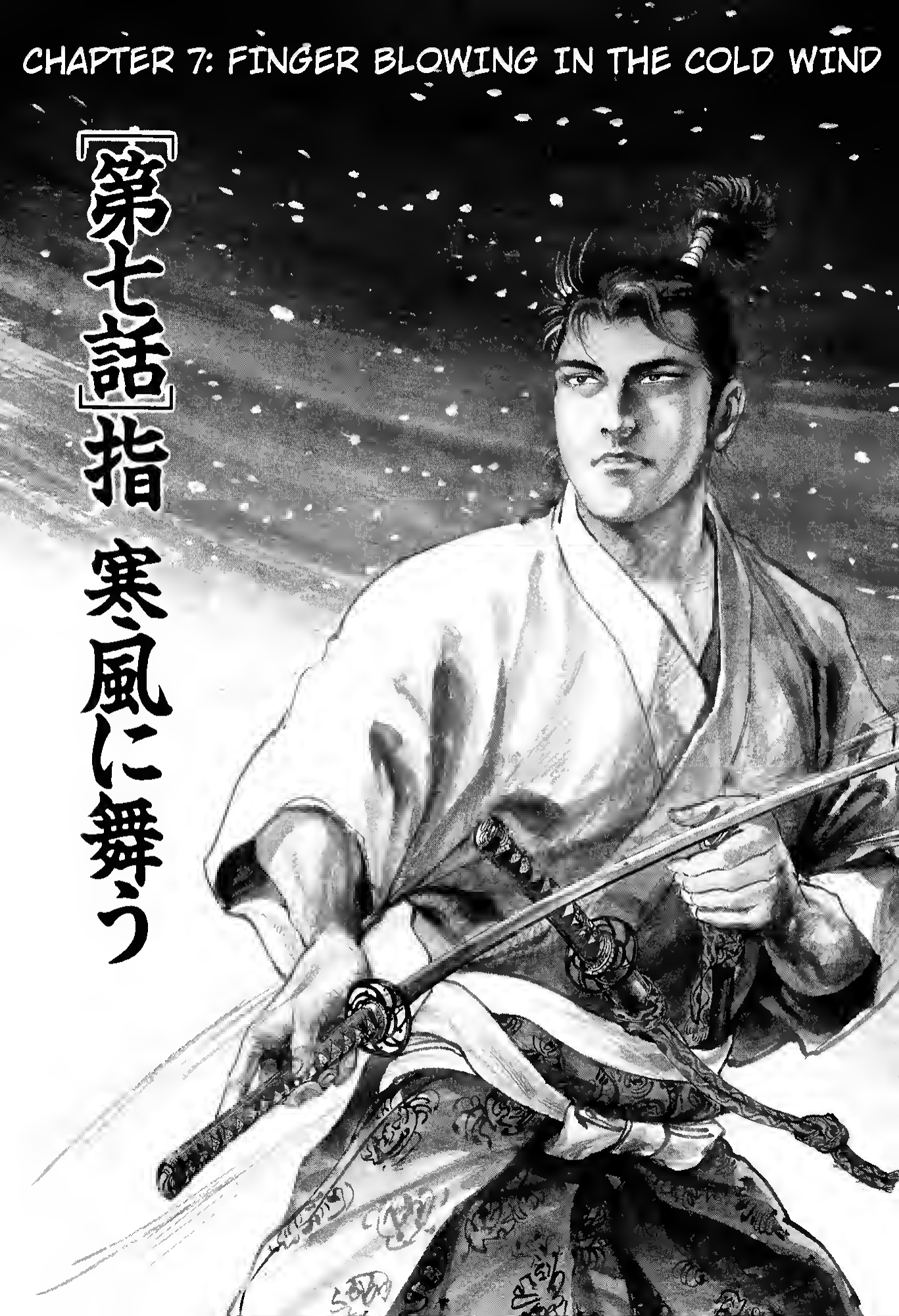
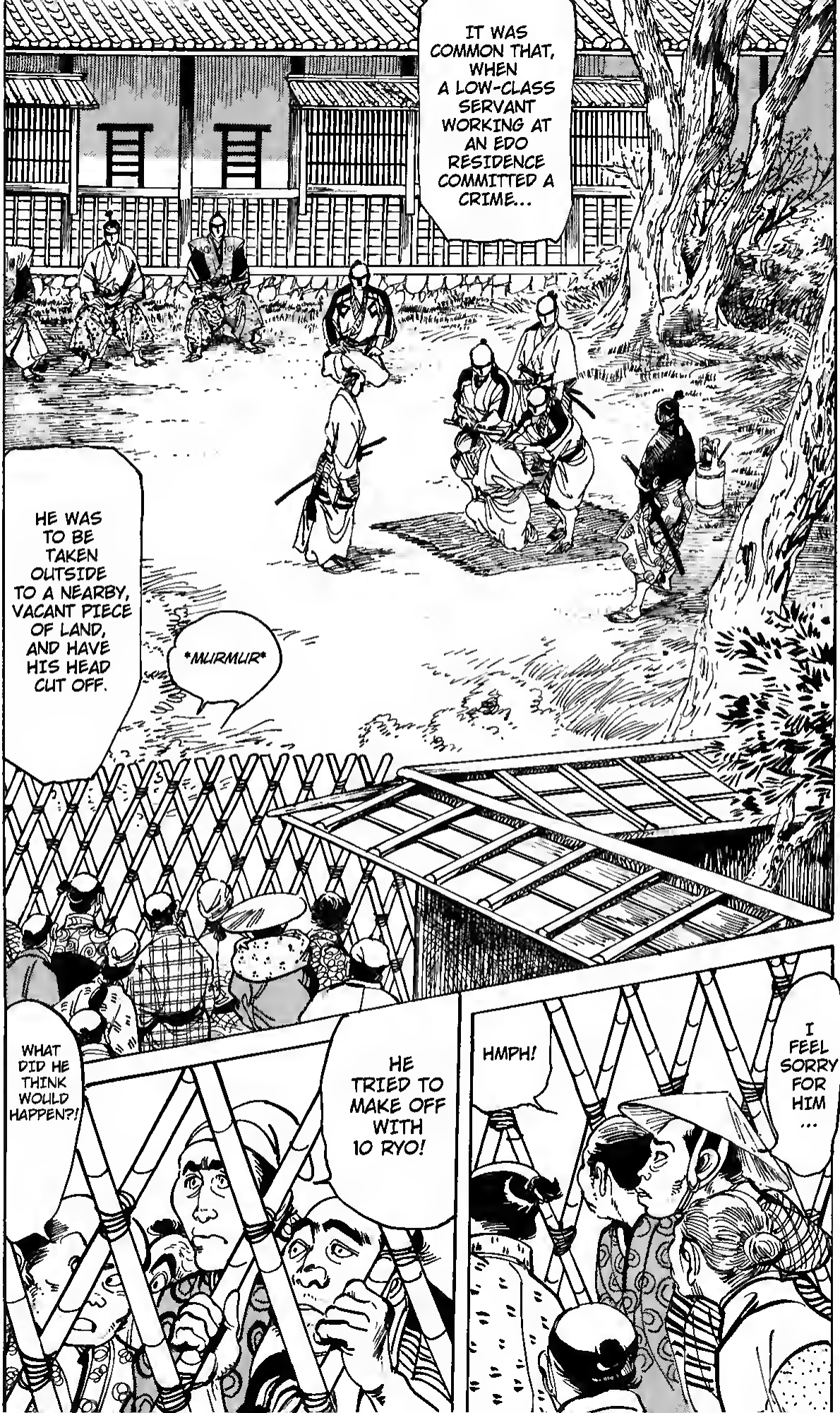
PUBLISHED IN COMIC RAN

CHAPTER 7: FINGER BLOWING IN THE COLD WIND

『第七話』指 寒風に舞う



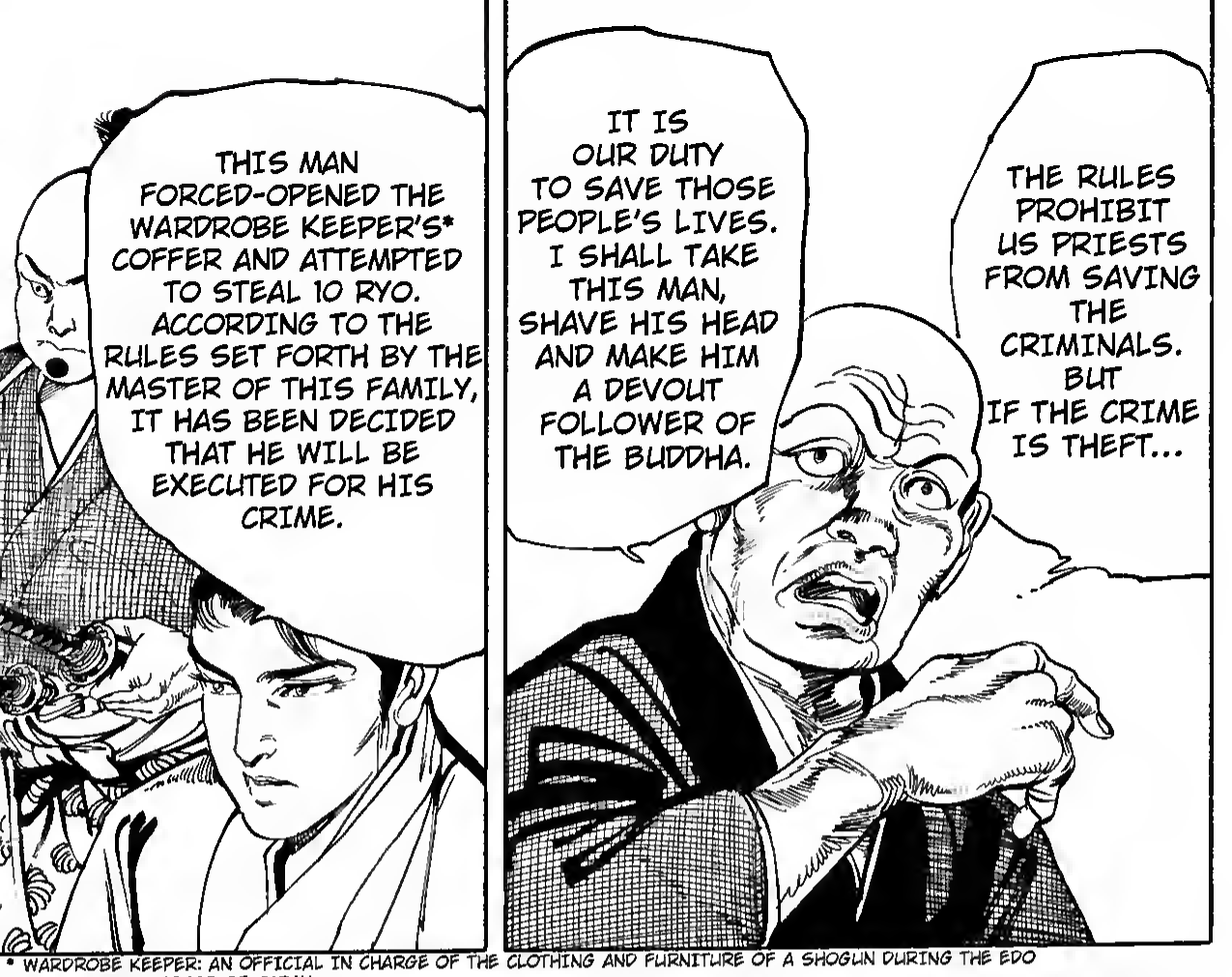

IT WAS COMMON THAT, WHEN A LOW-CLASS SERVANT WORKING AT AN EDO RESIDENCE COMMITTED A CRIME...
HE WAS TO BE TAKEN OUTSIDE TO A NEARBY, VACANT PIECE OF LAND, AND HAVE HIS HEAD CUT OFF.
MURMUR
WHAT DID HE THINK WOULD HAPPEN?!
HE TRIED TO MAKE OFF WITH 10 RYO!
HMPH!
I FEEL SORRY FOR HIM ...

THE EXECUTIONER WAS TO BE TEIZO KOYAMA OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE...
RENYA, BEING MASTER OF SHIN-KAGE STYLE, WAS ALSO ATTENDING AS AN OBSERVER.
GET READY, SENPACHI.
IF YOU TRULY REGRET YOUR CRIMES, DO NOT RESIST...
AND I WILL SWIFTLY SEE YOU OFF TO THE OTHER WORLD.
TMP!

バサ
RUSTLE
CLAP *CLAP*
I HAVE SAVED THAT MAN!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
WHA?!
I, PRIEST SEIGAN, PLACE THIS MAN UNDER MY PROTECTION!
JUST WHEN YOU WERE ABOUT TO STRIKE, I RUSHED IN AND COVERED HIM WITH A MONK'S STOLE! I DID IT!

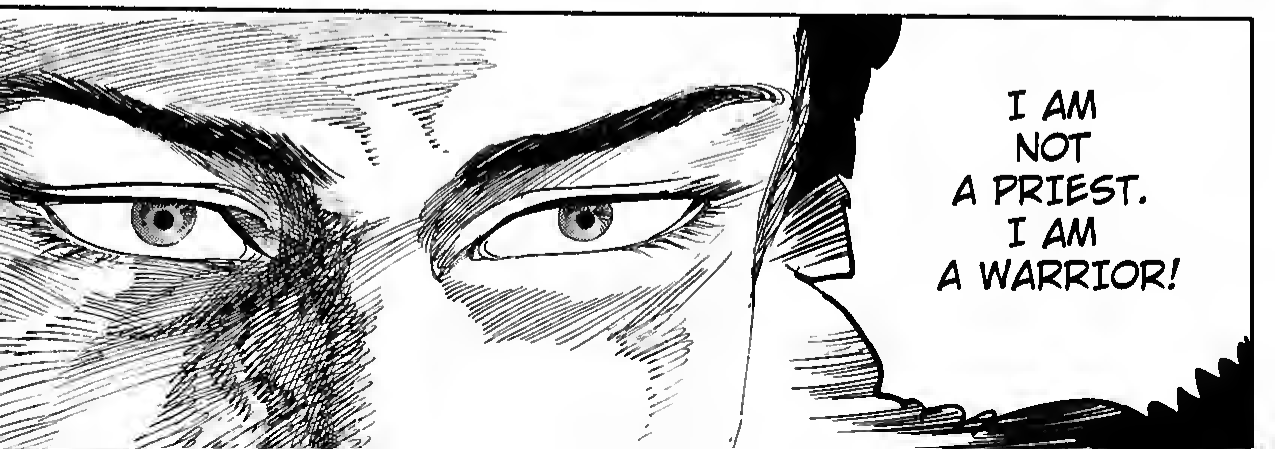
BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, I COVERED HIM WITH THIS STOLE!
IN THE NAME OF THE FAMILY, WE CANNOT ALLOW THAT!
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING, SAVING A GUILTY CRIMINAL ?!
DO NOT TOUCH IT!
WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING?!
YOU'D ESSENTIALLY BE ROBBING ME OF LIFE!
A MONK'S STOLE IS HIS LIFE! IF YOU DARE TO REMOVE IT FROM THIS MAN ...

DON'T YOU KNOW THAT SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, WHENEVER A MONK COVERED A CRIMINAL WITH HIS STOLE, THAT MAN WOULD BE PLACED UNDER THE MONK'S PROTECTION?!
IT IS TRUE THAT I READ OF SUCH AN ANCIENT CUSTOM IN AN OLD BOOK ONCE.
HOWEVER, THAT MAN VIOLATED THE RULES OF THIS FAMILY. I CANNOT ALLOW YOU TO INTERFERE HERE.
WITH THOSE SENTENCED TO DEATH BY BURNING, CRUCIFIXION, OR FOR SERIOUS OFFENCES LIKE SLAYING ONE'S PARENTS ...


THIS MAN FORCED-OPENED THE WARDROBE KEEPER'S* COFFER AND ATTEMPTED TO STEAL 10 RYO. ACCORDING TO THE RULES SET FORTH BY THE MASTER OF THIS FAMILY, IT HAS BEEN DECIDED THAT HE WILL BE EXECUTED FOR HIS CRIME.
IT IS OUR DUTY TO SAVE THOSE PEOPLE'S LIVES. I SHALL TAKE THIS MAN, SHAVE HIS HEAD AND MAKE HIM A DEVOUT FOLLOWER OF THE BUDDHA.
THE RULES PROHIBIT US PRIESTS FROM SAVING THE CRIMINALS. BUT IF THE CRIME IS THEFT...

* WARDROBE KEEPER: AN OFFICIAL IN CHARGE OF THE CLOTHING AND FURNITURE OF A SHOGUN DURING THE EDO GOVERNMENT PERIOD OF JAPAN.

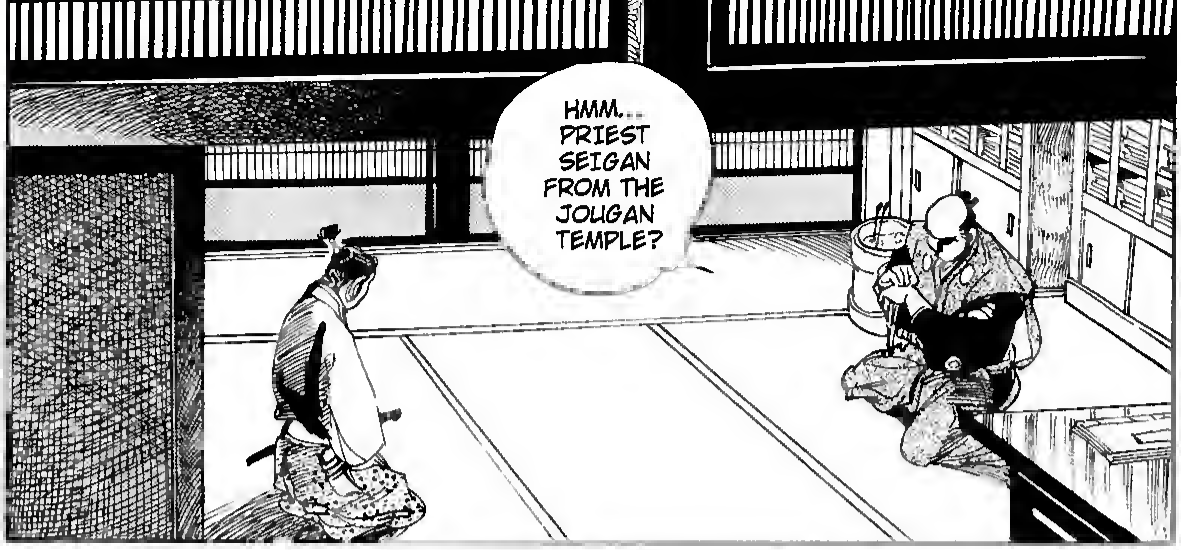
HIS LIFE WILL BE SPARED. THE PUBLIC LAW SURPASSES THAT OF THIS FAMILY OR THIS CLAN FOR IT IS THE LAW OF THE BUDDHA!
THAT IS THE LAW OF THIS "FAMILY." BUT "PUBLIC" LAW SAYS THAT IF I COVER HIM WITH A STOLE...



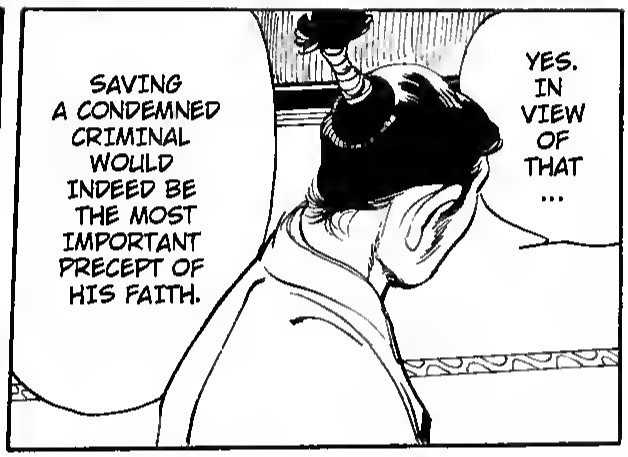
THIS IS YOUR LAST CHANCE. STAND DOWN.
DO NOT FORGET! THOSE WHO KILL A PRIEST ...
WILL BE CURSED TO THE SEVENTH GENERATION!
THAT'S JUST A FAIRYTALE PRIESTS CAME UP WITH TO PROTECT THEIR OWN LIVES.
I DO NOT BELIEVE IN IT.
NOW, MOVE!
I WOULD BE BETRAYING MY DUTY AS A SERVANT OF THE BUDDHA!

GRAB!
I AM A WARRIOR!
I MUST CARRY OUT MY PRIESTLY DUTIES!
IF YOU MUST DO IT, THEN I WILL HAVE YOU KILL US BOTH!

IS THAT IT?
OH? WILL HE SPARE HIM?
SIGN LOWER VILLA
滿下屋敷
AND WAIT FOR MY RETURN.
STAY HERE ...


HMM... PRIEST SEIGAN FROM THE JOUGAN TEMPLE?

IN THAT CASE ...
BUT ...

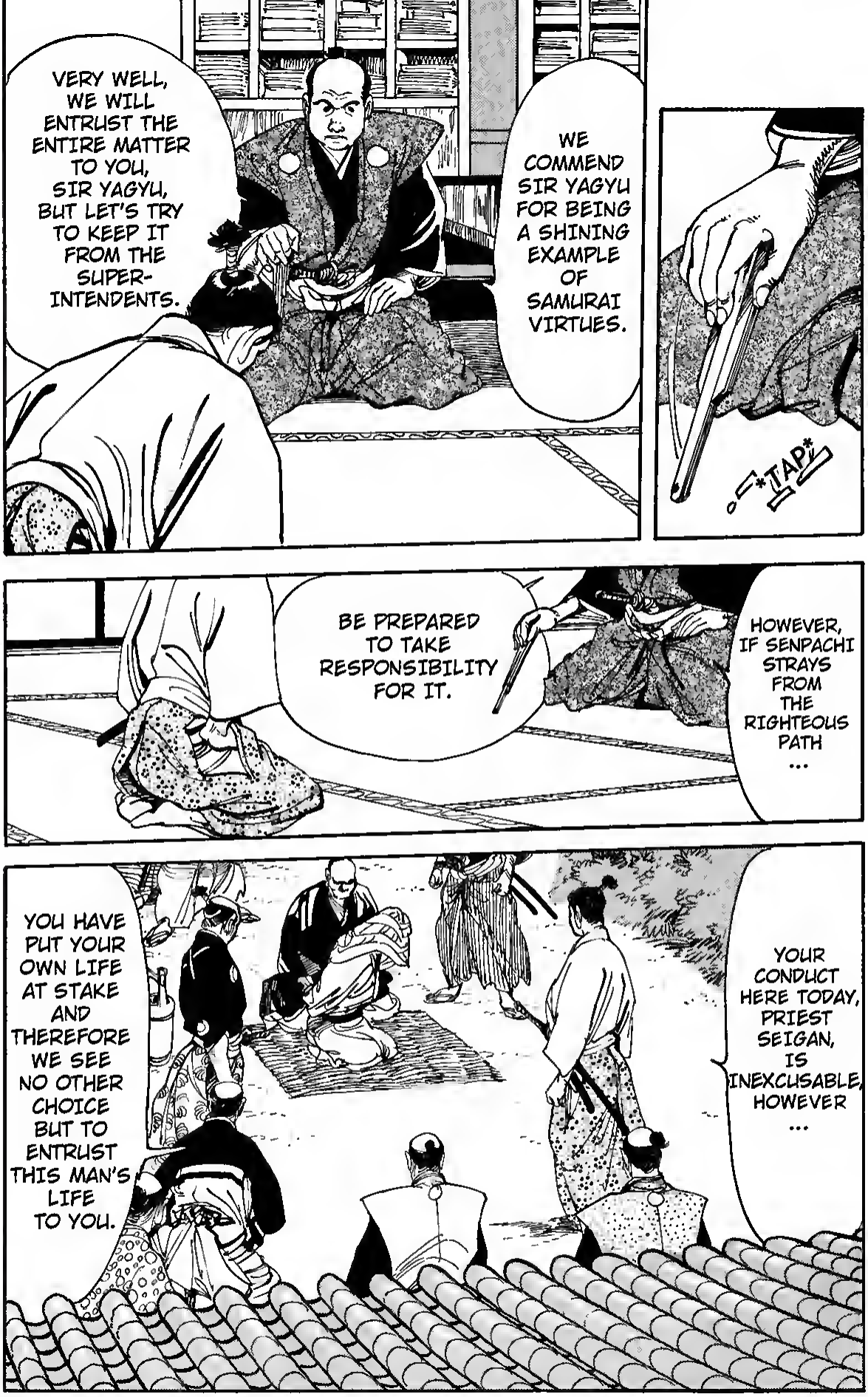

SAVING A CONDEMNED CRIMINAL WOULD INDEED BE THE MOST IMPORTANT PRECEPT OF HIS FAITH.
YES. IN VIEW OF THAT ...

WHAT IF SENPACHI BETRAYS SEIGAN? WHAT THEN?
IF THAT HAPPENS, I SHALL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.

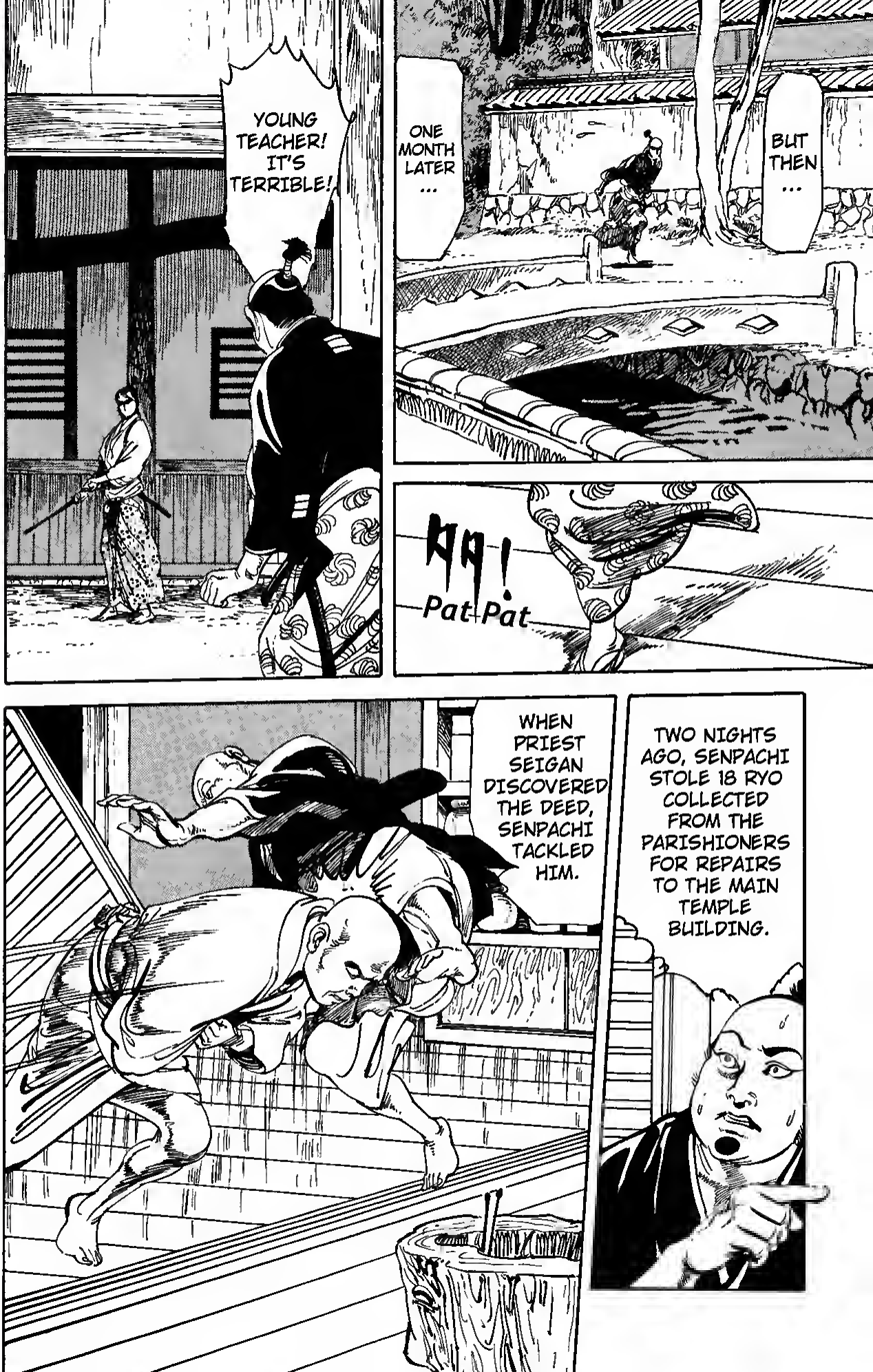
EVEN SO, SEN-PACHI ...

I BELIEVE HE WILL NO LONGER BE TEMPTED BY HIS MATERIAL DESIRES ...
WAS MOVED TO TEARS BY SEIGAN'S COMPASSION. AND HAVING GLIMPSED THE SPECTER OF DEATH...

IF WE ENTRUST SENPACHI TO HIM, HE SHALL BECOME A FOLLOWER OF THE BUDDHA, LEAVING THE MATERIAL WORLD BEHIND HIM. IT WILL BE AS IF HE TRULY HAD DIED.


VERY WELL, WE WILL ENTRUST THE ENTIRE MATTER TO YOU, SIR YAGYU, BUT LET'S TRY TO KEEP IT FROM THE SUPER-INTENDENTS.
WE COMMEND SIR YAGYU FOR BEING A SHINING EXAMPLE OF SAMURAI VIRTUES.
TAP
BE PREPARED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.
HOWEVER, IF SENPACHI STRAYS FROM THE RIGHTEOUS PATH ...
YOU HAVE PUT YOUR OWN LIFE AT STAKE AND THEREFORE WE SEE NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO ENTRUST THIS MAN'S LIFE TO YOU.
YOUR CONDUCT HERE TODAY, PRIEST SEIGAN, IS INEXCUSABLE, HOWEVER ...

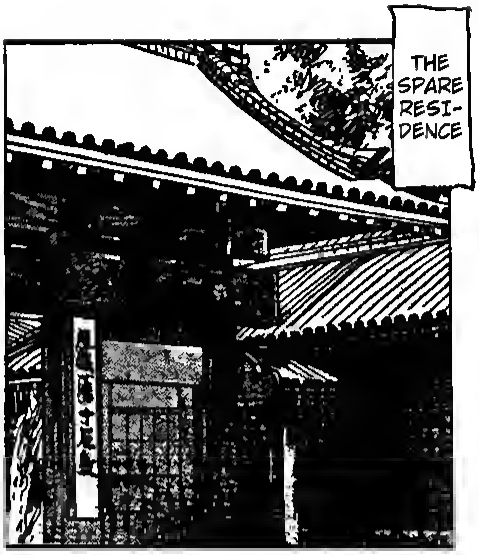
HOWEVER! IF SENPACHI DOES NOT DEVOUT HIS LIFE TO SERVING THE BUDDHA ...
LET IT BE KNOWN THAT I SHALL THEN FIND HIM AND TAKE HIS HEAD.
THIS IS BORING!
WOOOW!
WOOO!
HE SPENT HIS AFTERNOONS WORKING WITH HIS HANDS AND AT NIGHT HE READ THE SUTRAS AND PURIFIED HIMSELF, NEVER TAKING A STEP OUTSIDE THE TEMPLE.
AND SO, SENPACHI SHAVED HIS HEAD IN THE JOUGAN TEMPLE.


YOUNG TEACHER! IT'S TERRIBLE!
ONE MONTH LATER ...
BUT THEN ...
Pat Pat
TWO NIGHTS AGO, SENPACHI STOLE 18 RYO COLLECTED FROM THE PARISHIONERS FOR REPAIRS TO THE MAIN TEMPLE BUILDING.
WHEN PRIEST SEIGAN DISCOVERED THE DEED, SENPACHI TACKLED HIM.

HE'S DISAPPEARED SOMEWHERE WITH THE MONEY!
NOW ...
BAM!
YOU FUCKING MONKS!
SHAVED HEAD?! PATH OF THE BUDDHA?! TO HELL WITH THAT!
SEISEN IS... (SENPACHI'S BUDDHIST NAME)

SEISEN MUST HAVE HAD HIS REASONS TO DO THIS.
NOT TO BLAME. I FAILED TO KEEP THE MONEY A SECRET FROM HIM.
YOU DAMN FOOL!
EVEN ON THE VERGE OF DEATH YOU SAY SUCH THINGS!
BUT HE WILL RETURN. SOME DAY... HE WILL DEFINITELY RETURN.
AT THE VILLA.
SIR YAGYU!

WE HAVE FAILED TO UPHOLD THE LAW OF THIS FAMILY. OUR FAULT IS TRULY GRAVE!
THE ONLY ONE AT FAULT ...
IS ME.
I SHALL ATTEMPT TO MAKE AMENDS TO LORD TOKUGAWA AND THE SUPER-INTENDENTS FOR VIOLATING THE RULES OF THIS FAMILY.


THE SPARE RESI-DENCE

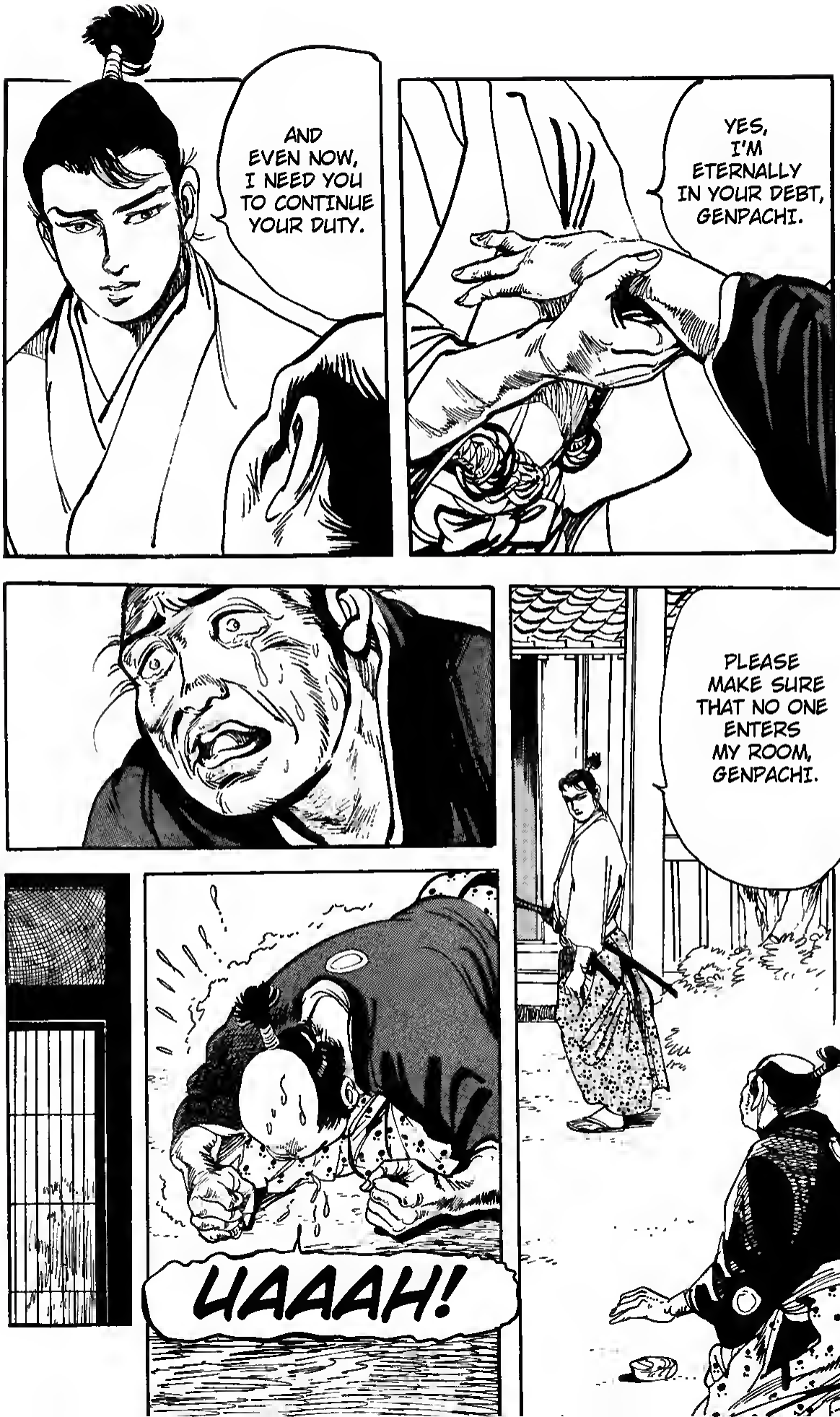
YOUNG MASTER !!

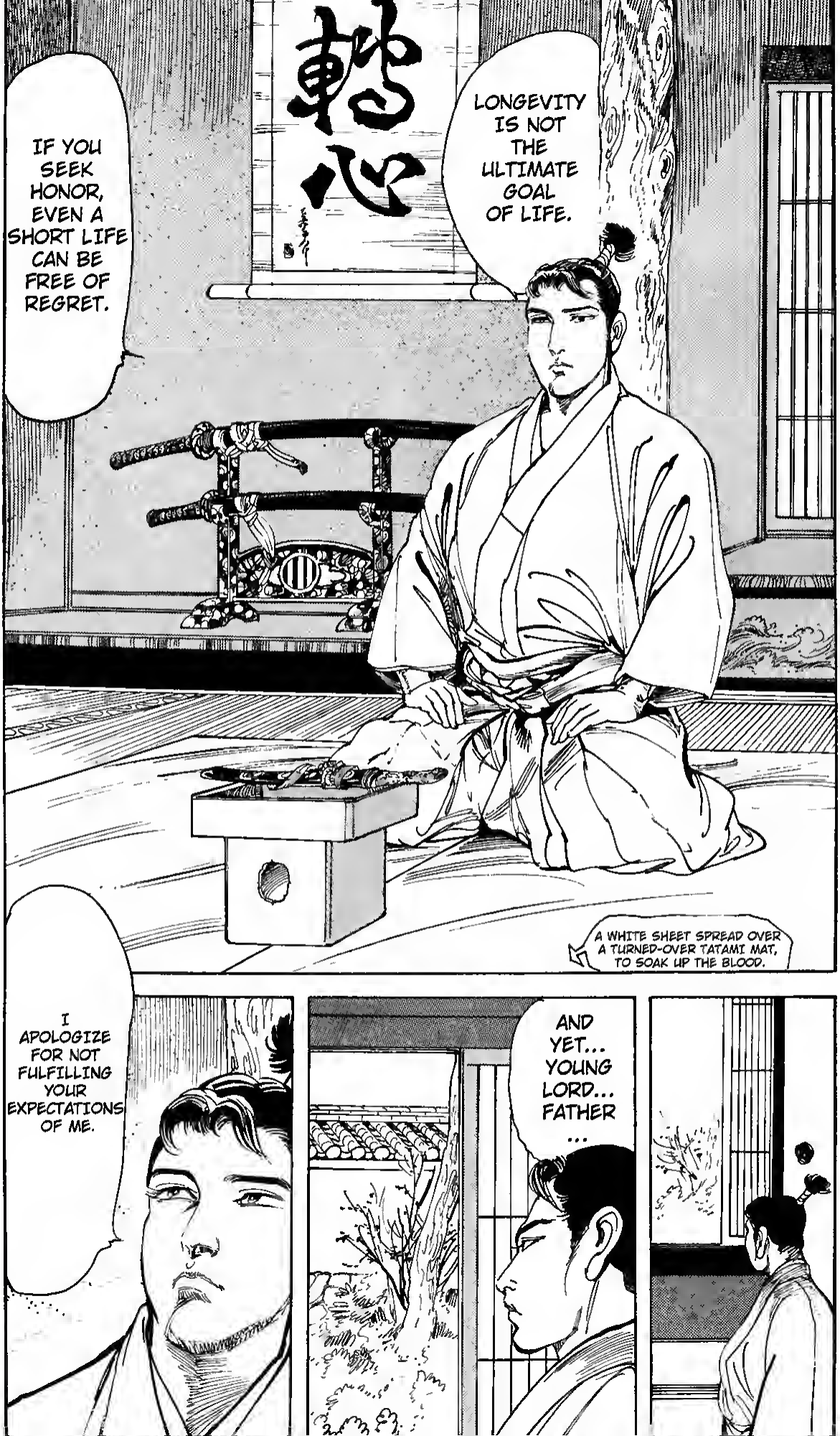
WOULD YOU ...
PLEASE.

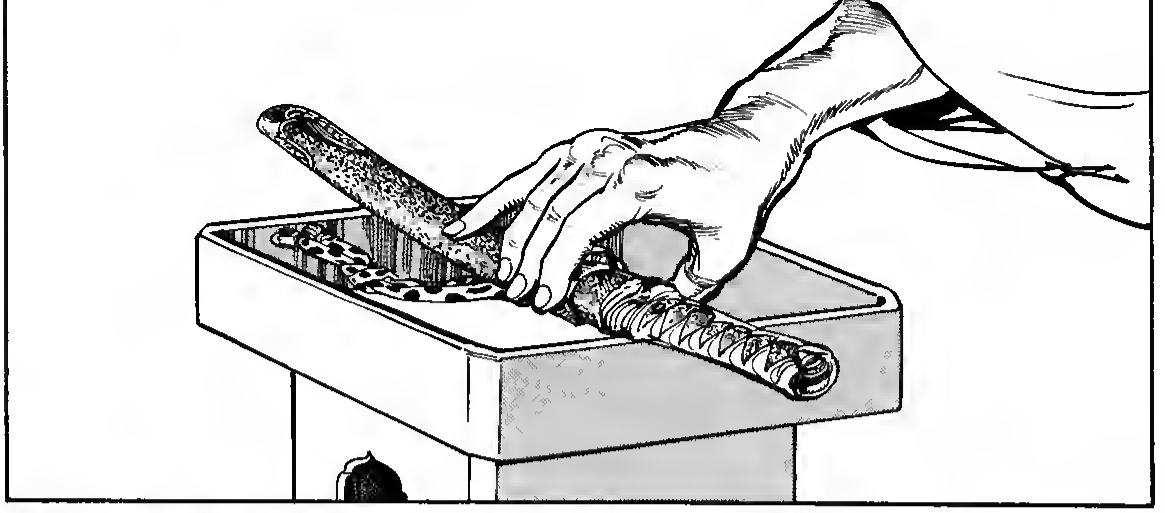
I ONLY KNOW HOW TO LIVE BY THE SWORD.
GEN-PACHI.
PLEASE FLEE FROM EDO IMMEDIATELY.
TO RID THEMSELVES OF IDLE THOUGHTS AND CLEAR THEIR MINDS.
THOSE WHO WALK THE PATH OF THE SWORD AND LONG FOR REAL COMBAT MUST BE PREPARED ...
HOWEVER, IT IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE. TO HUMANS WITH PHYSICAL BODIES IT'S AN EXCEEDINGLY HARD CONCEPT TO GRASP.
ONLY AFTER UNDERSTANDING THAT WILL YOU BE ABLE TO MASTER THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE'S MOON ON THE WATER.
IT ESSENTIALLY MEANS TO NOT FEAR DEATH FOR IT AND LIFE ARE PART OF THE SAME COIN.

AND FOLLOWED "PUBLIC" LAW INSTEAD OF THE "FAMILY" LAW.
THEREFORE, I DID AS HE SAID ...
AND ALL TO SAVE THE LIFE OF A CRIMINAL ...
HE DID NOT FEAR DEATH.
BUT AT THAT TIME, PRIEST SEIGAN CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD IT.
AHAHA, I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN, YOUNG MASTER.
I REALLY DO BUT ...
YES, YES.

HERE. THIS IS ...
ALL THE MONEY I HAVE.
NOW IT IS NOT THE TIME TO OPEN YOUR BELLY.
BUT THAT IS THAT.
THERE SHOULD BE 10 RYO IN THERE SO PLEASE GO SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY FROM HERE.
I CANNOT LET YOU DIE HERE!
IT'S BEEN MY DUTY TO PROTECT YOU, YOUNG MASTER, SINCE YOU WERE A CHILD!
I AM A WARRIOR, GENPACHI.


AND EVEN NOW, I NEED YOU TO CONTINUE YOUR DUTY.
YES, I'M ETERNALLY IN YOUR DEBT, GENPACHI.
PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT NO ONE ENTERS MY ROOM, GENPACHI.
UAAAH!


LONGEVITY IS NOT THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF LIFE.
IF YOU SEEK HONOR, EVEN A SHORT LIFE CAN BE FREE OF REGRET.
A WHITE SHEET SPREAD OVER A TURNED-OVER TATAMI MAT, TO SOAK UP THE BLOOD.
AND YET... YOUNG LORD... FATHER ...
I APOLOGIZE FOR NOT FULFILLING YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF ME.



AH!! YOUNG LORD.

HEY, HEIZA.

Bam Bam

YOU ORDERED HIM TO DO THAT?!!
SIR YAGYU HAS GONE TO HIS RESIDENCE TO COMMIT SEPPUKU AS PENANCE FOR HIS MISTAKES ...

SIR YAGYU HAS ...!
DID HE GO OFF SOME-WHERE?!
WHERE IS TOSHI-KANE?!

MY LORD. THE STRICT TRADITIONS AND THE SAMURAI CODE OF THIS FAMILY RESONATE THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND THEREFORE ...
FORCING A RETAINER TO COMMIT SEPPUKU FOR AIDING A MAN WHO'S BROKEN THE RULES OF THIS FAMILY AT THE RISK OF HIS OWN LIFE...
I BELIEVE THAT ...
BREAKING THE RULES OF THIS FAMILY ...
IDIOT!
DO YOU WANT THE WORLD TO LAUGH AT ME AS THE SAMURAI WITHOUT A SENSE OF JUSTICE?!

IF YOU DON'T MAKE IT, I WILL TEAR YOU LIMB FROM LIMB!
GO AT ONCE AND STOP YAGYU'S SEPPUKU!

TOSHIKANE YAGYU IS HERE, AS YOU COMMANDED.
HMPH.
WINTER IS COMING ...
THE BROWN THRUSHES ARE NESTING IN THE GARDEN.
...
YOU CAN'T SEE THEM FROM THERE. COME OVER HERE AND LOOK.
HE'S TRYING HARD TO BUILD A NEST ON THAT BRANCH.
BUT ...

NO MATTER HOW HARD HE TRIES, ONE DAY A CROW WILL COME AND TAKE THAT TREE AWAY FROM HIM, AND THAT WILL BE IT ...
IT'S THE SAME WITH HUMANS.
TAKE SEIGAN FOR EXAMPLE. EVEN IF THAT CRIMINAL HE SAVED WENT ON TO BECOME A NOBLE PRIEST ...
AND WE WERE TO PRAISE HIS WISDOM FOR YEARS TO COME ...
THE HUMAN HEART... AND THE HUMAN WORLD ...
ARE BEYOND ANYONE'S CONTROL.
BY THE WAY, TOSHI-KANE.
YE ...
DO NOT MAKE LIGHT OF THIS FAMILY'S RULES!

WHOOP!
USE THAT TIME TO REFLECT ON YOUR MANY MISTAKES!
YOU'RE UNDER HOUSE ARREST FOR THREE DAYS!
TUMBLE

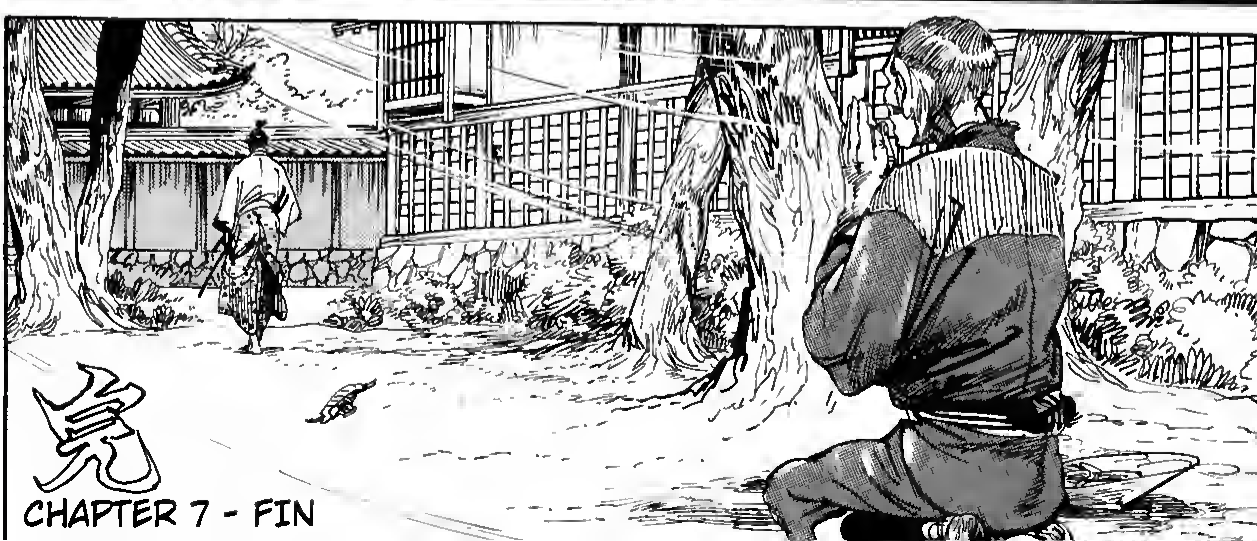
SLAM
TURN
I AM ETERNALLY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR LORDSHIP'S MERCY.
MORE THAN A MONTH LATER.
THAT FUCKING BRAT ...
EEH!
THROB
A MAN ARRIVED AT THE SPARE RESIDENCE, ASKING FOR AN AUDIENCE WITH RENYA.

I HAVE RETURNED TO THE TEMPLE LAST NIGHT.
MASTER TOLD ME TO GO AND RECEIVE MY PUNISHMENT FROM SIR YAGYU.
THAT IS WHY I'M HERE.
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
THE NAGA-SAKI RED-LIGHT DISTRICT.
RED-LIGHT DISTRICT?
AFTER I WAS ABANDONED AS A CHILD, A KIND MAN TOOK ME IN AND RAISED ME UNTIL I WAS 13. AFTER HE DIED, HIS DAUGHTER HAD BEEN SOLD TO A BROTHEL.
I USED THE MONEY I STOLE TO BUY HER FREEDOM.

I HAVE ...
NO REGRETS. WHATEVER YOUR JUDGMENT MAY BE, I'M READY FOR IT.
VERY GOOD.
THEN, LET MY SWORD DELIVER MY JUDGMENT.

SWOOSH

KLING!



●【第七話】完●

完

CHAPTER 7 - FIN

THIS CRANE LOOKS LIKE IT'S ABOUT TO FLY AWAY AT ANY MOMENT.
HMMM ...
I BET YOUNG TEACHER WANTS ONE TOO, RIGHT?
HE-HE-HE.
MATASHICHI HIGONO IS A TRUE MASTER CRAFTSMAN WHEN IT COMES TO GUARDS.
RIGHT? RIGHT?!
IT HAS ...
ALWAYS BEEN MY DREAM TO ATTACH ...
A MATASHICHI GUARD TO MY FILED-DOWN BIZEN KIYOMITSU SWORD.
BUT MATASHICHI'S GUARDS ARE SO EXPENSIVE ...

第八話 居合剣 心法一拍子（しんぽうひとひょうし）

CHAPTER 8: MIND READING, ONE-BEAT IAI SWORD

HAHA, I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL.
WITH THIS, I WILL ALWAYS BE IN A GOOD MOOD, WHEREVER I GO.
TAP!
I HAD TO SCRIMP AND SAVE FOR MANY YEARS TO AFFORD THIS GUARD.

HE'S ALREADY KILLED 23 SAMURAI.
AH, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THAT IAI* SWORDSMAN ...
PLEASE BE CAREFUL.
BUT MR. KIKUTO, LATELY A MYSTERIOUS SWORDSMAN HAS BEEN APPEARING IN THE AREA AND STEALING BEAUTIFUL SWORDS.
WE'LL SEE WHOSE IAI IS STRONGER!
WHATEVER HIS REASONS, I DEFINITELY WANT TO FACE HIM.
HMM.
MORE IMPORTANTLY, TEACHER, WHY DO YOU THINK HE ONLY TARGETS THE SAMURAI CONNECTED TO THE TOKUGAWA FAMILY ...?

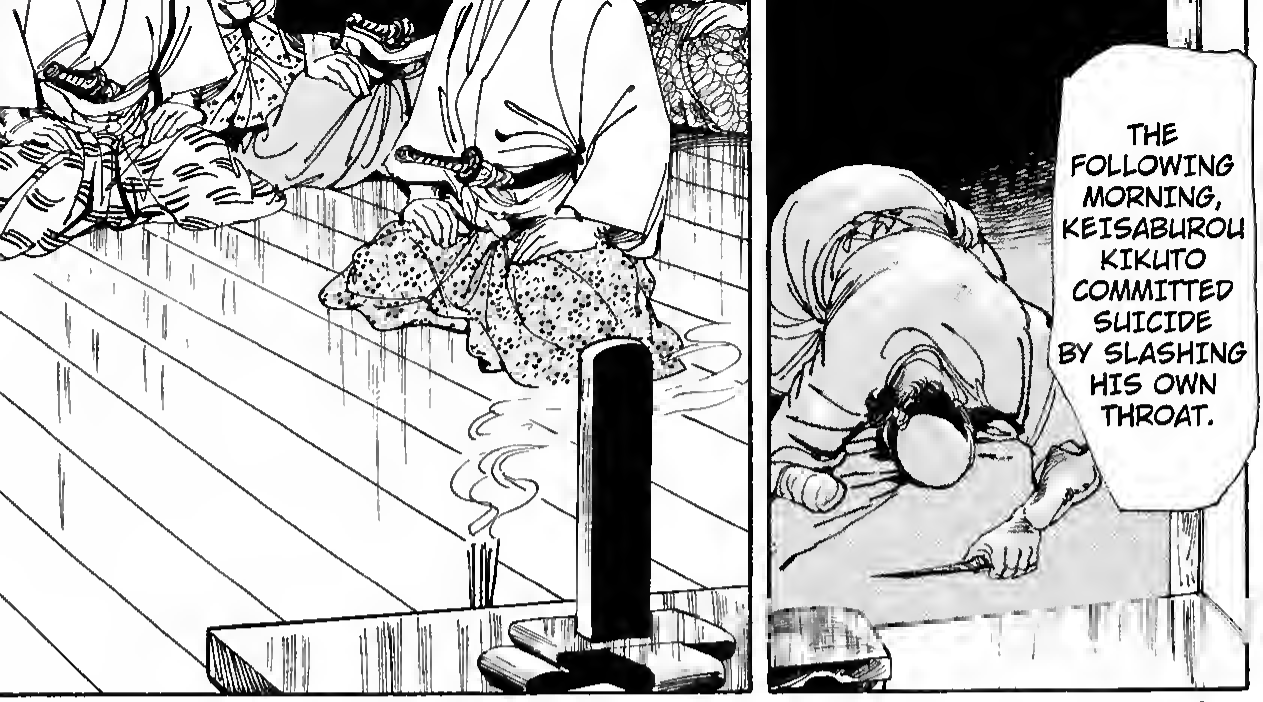
* A JAPANESE MARTIAL ART ASSOCIATED WITH THE SMOOTH, CONTROLLED MOVEMENTS OF DRAWING THE SWORD FROM ITS SHEATH, STRIKING OR CUTTING AN OPPONENT, REMOVING BLOOD FROM THE BLADE, AND THEN REPLACING THE SWORD IN THE SHEATH.

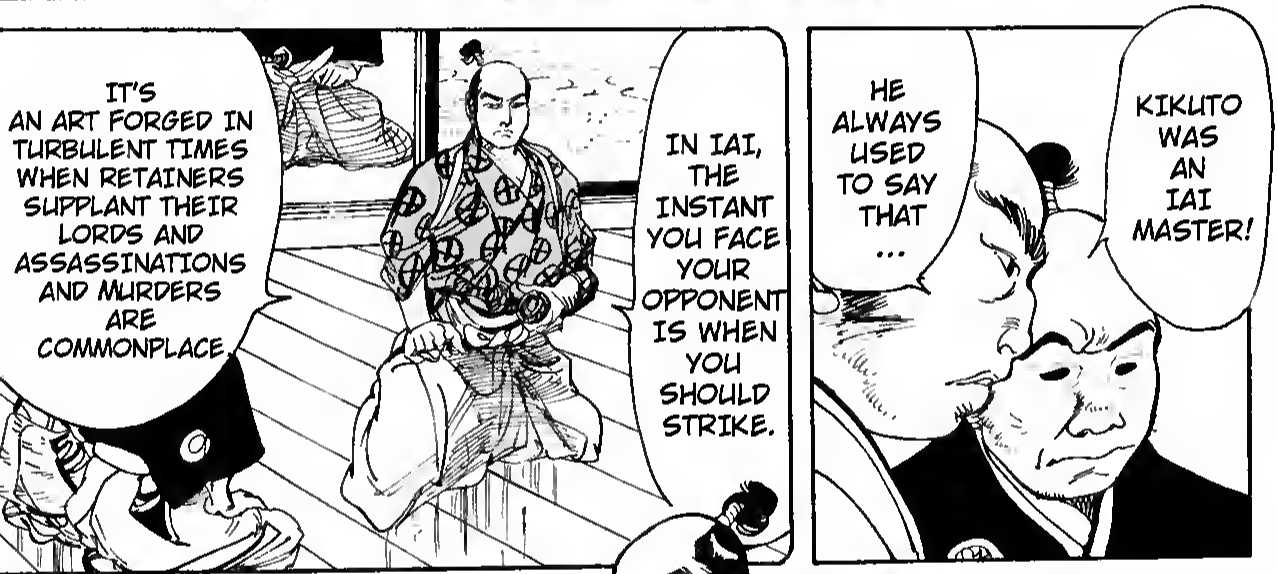
HOLD IT!

YOU CAME OUT OF THE OWARI MANSION SO YOU MUST BE AN OWARI RETAINER.
WHO ARE YOU ...?
BE QUIET AND LAY YOUR SWORD DOWN ON THE GROUND.
DO AS I SAY OR I WILL KILL YOU!

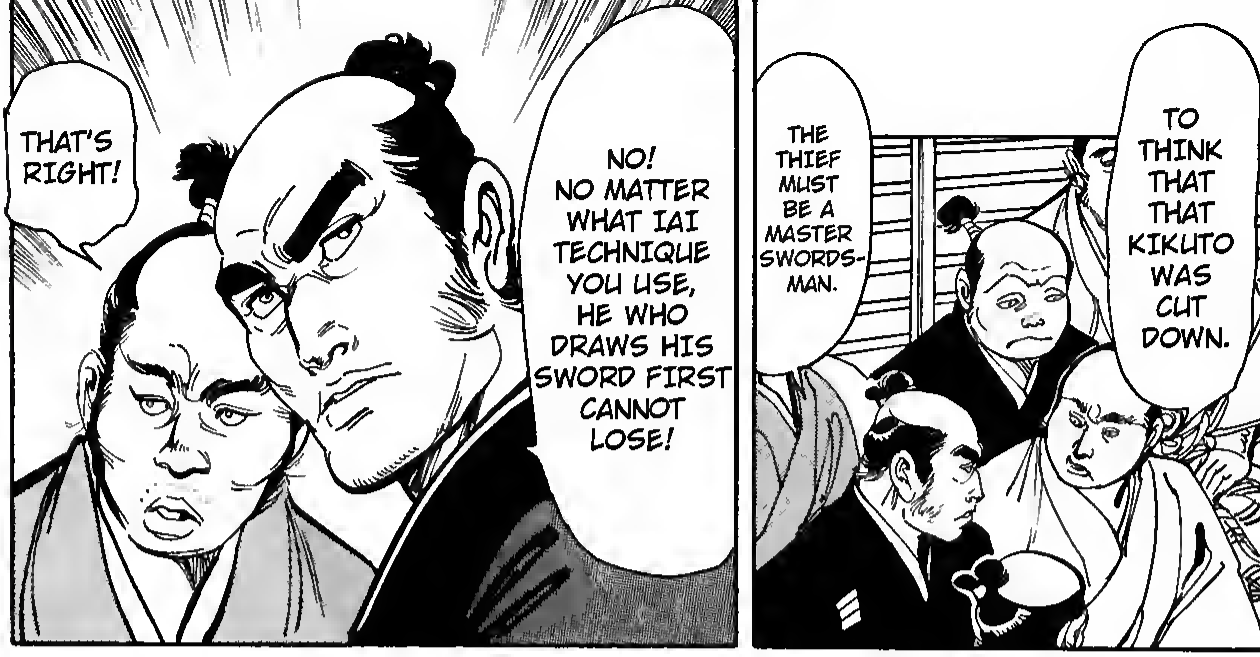
YOU'RE THAT IAI SWORDS-MAN!
SWOOSH

SLIDE
SOMEONE'S CUT OFF KIKUTO'S RIGHT ARM!
YOUNG TEACHER!
TAP TAP
THEIR SWORD FIRST?
WHO DREW...
I'VE LOST MY FAMILY'S ANCESTRAL SWORD...
NOT ONLY WAS I WOUNDED...
MR. KIKU...
I DID. AND YET...


THE FOLLOWING MORNING, KEISABUROU KIKUTO COMMITTED SUICIDE BY SLASHING HIS OWN THROAT.

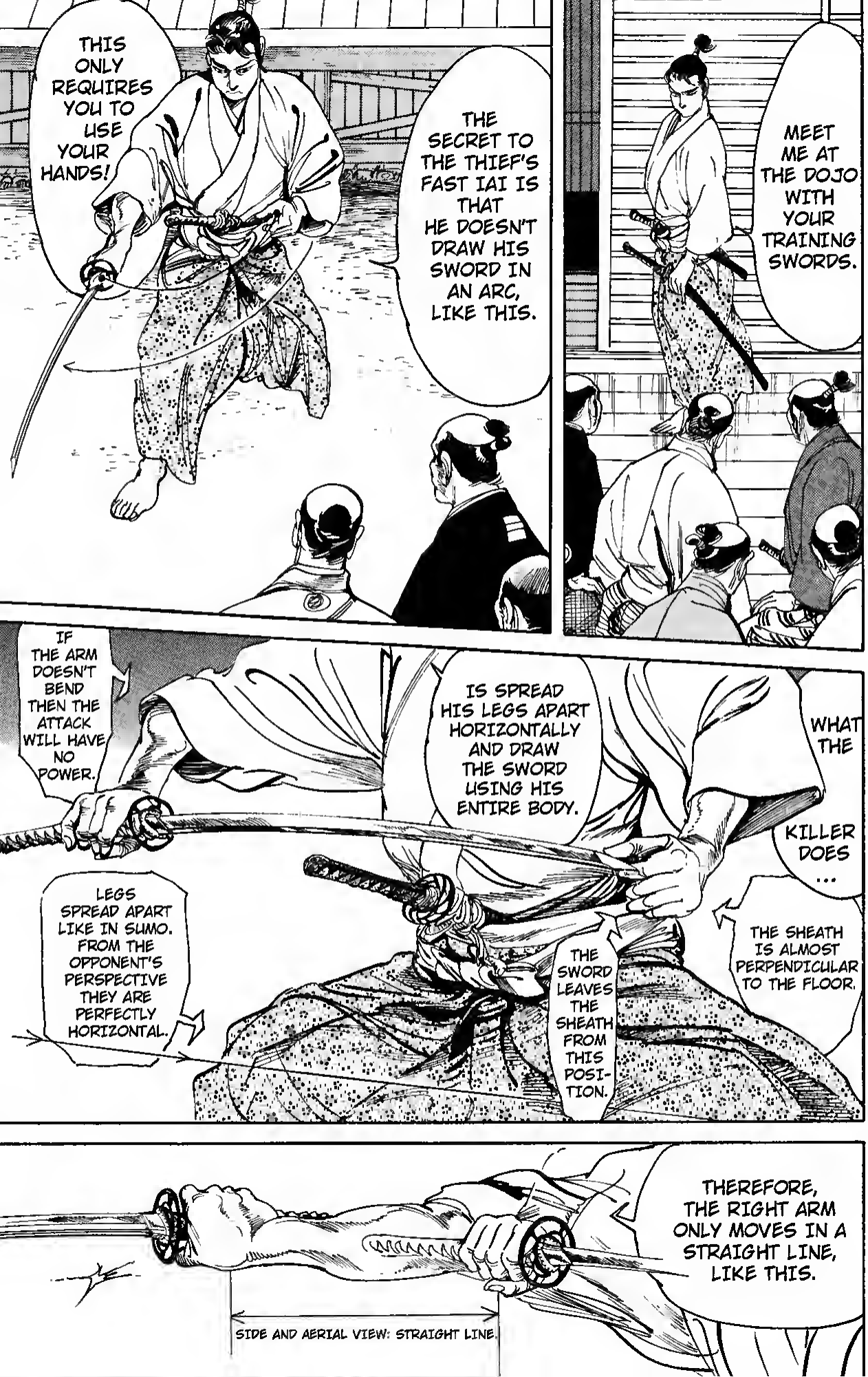

KIKUTO WAS AN IAI MASTER!
HE ALWAYS USED TO SAY THAT ...
IN IAI, THE INSTANT YOU FACE YOUR OPPONENT IS WHEN YOU SHOULD STRIKE.
IT'S AN ART FORGED IN TURBULENT TIMES WHEN RETAINERS SUPPLANT THEIR LORDS AND ASSASSINATIONS AND MURDERS ARE COMMONPLACE.

IAI IS NOTHING LIKE A REGULAR DUEL WHERE TWO OPPONENTS CROSS SWORDS AND CALMLY ANNOUNCE THEIR NAMES. IT STARTS AND CONCLUDES IN AN INSTANT.
THE RESULT IS DECIDED INSIDE THE SHEATH.
THAT IS WHY, AS A SAMURAI, I PUT A GREAT IMPORTANCE ON THE ART OF IAI.


TO THINK THAT THAT KIKUTO WAS CUT DOWN.
THE THIEF MUST BE A MASTER SWORDS-MAN.
NO! NO MATTER WHAT IAI TECHNIQUE YOU USE, HE WHO DRAWS HIS SWORD FIRST CANNOT LOSE!
THAT'S RIGHT!

THAT'S RIGHT! STARTING TOMORROW I WILL TAKE NIGHTLY WALKS UNTIL I ENCOUNTER THAT BASTARD!
ALL OF US SHALL AVENGE KIKUTO!
WAIT !

DO NOT UNDER-ESTIMATE THE THIEF'S IAI!
HIS SKILL IS TO BE RECKONED WITH!
BUT MASTER, ISN'T IAI MERELY DECIDED INSIDE THE SHEATH?!
DO NOT THINK SO LIGHTLY OF IAI!


THIS ONLY REQUIRES YOU TO USE YOUR HANDS!
THE SECRET TO THE THIEF'S FAST IAI IS THAT HE DOESN'T DRAW HIS SWORD IN AN ARC, LIKE THIS.
MEET ME AT THE DOJO WITH YOUR TRAINING SWORDS.
IF THE ARM DOESN'T BEND THEN THE ATTACK WILL HAVE NO POWER.
IS SPREAD HIS LEGS APART HORIZONTALLY AND DRAW THE SWORD USING HIS ENTIRE BODY.
WHAT THE KILLER DOES ...
LEGS SPREAD APART LIKE IN SUMO. FROM THE OPPONENT'S PERSPECTIVE THEY ARE PERFECTLY HORIZONTAL.
THE SWORD LEAVES THE SHEATH FROM THIS POSI-TION.
THE SHEATH IS ALMOST PERPENDICULAR TO THE FLOOR.
THEREFORE, THE RIGHT ARM ONLY MOVES IN A STRAIGHT LINE, LIKE THIS.
SIDE AND AERIAL VIEW: STRAIGHT LINE.

SO YOU SEE, THE LEGS, THE BODY AND THE RIGHT ARM ALL WORK TOGETHER TO DRAW YOUR SWORD ...
AND STRIKE YOUR OPPONENT IN ONE BEAT AS SOON AS YOUR HAND LANDS ON THE HILT.
?
LET'S HAVE A DEMONSTRATION. THE FASTEST ONE AMONG YOU IS MR. YAZAKI. TRY STRIKING ME FROM WHICHEVER SIDE YOU WANT!
!
STEP
STEP

FWOOSH!
THE SWORD IS NOWHERE NEAR THE HEAD YET. EVEN IF HE HAD FINISHED HIS SWING, RENYA WOULD'VE DODGED IT BY STEPPING TO THE SIDE.
SHHHWP
FASTER!
AGAIN!
THE GUARD DIRECTLY FACES THE CENTER OF THE BODY.

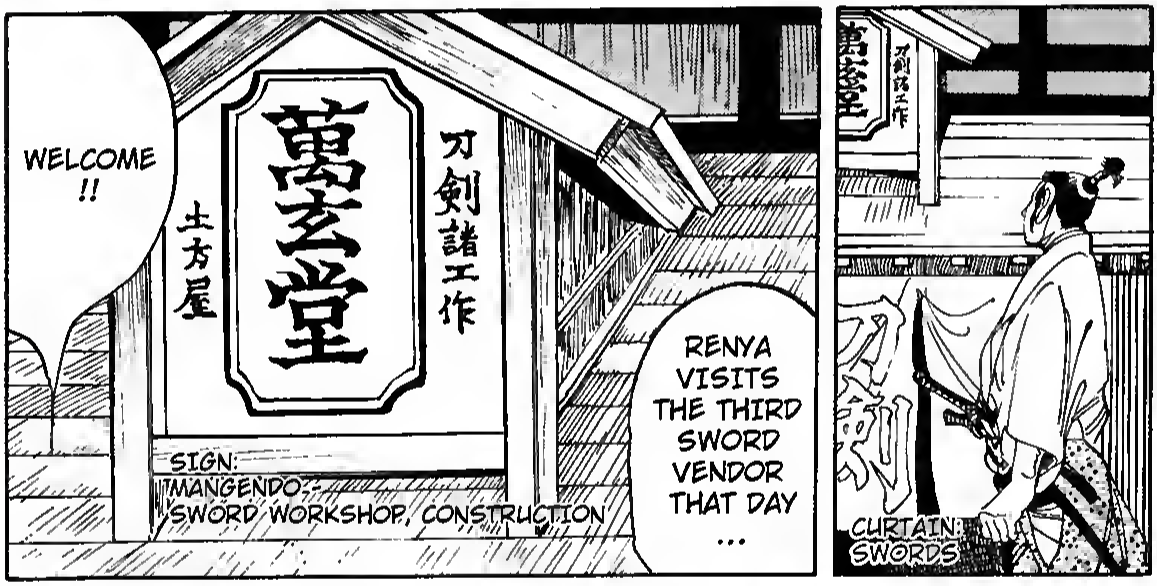
THE CURIOUS SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, CLOTHES RUSTLING AND SWORDS CLINGING.
FWAMP!!
DRAWS HIS SWORD AND SIMULTANEOUSLY MOVES HIS ENTIRE BODY TO THE LEFT.
HE SEEMS TO POSSESS A MYSTERIOUS POWER TO READ WHAT'S IN THE HEARTS OF HIS OPPONENTS - A MIND READING ART OR AN ENCHANTMENT TECHNIQUE.
BUT THE KILLER DOES MORE THAN THAT.
THE "ORIGIN" OF MOVEMENT IS REFLECTED IN ONE'S EYES, LEGS AND SHOULDERS. IF YOU CAN SPOT THAT "ORIGIN" YOU WILL BE FASTER THAN YOUR OPPONENT AND WIN OVER HIM.
DOESN'T ONLY RELY ON THE ONE-BEAT TECHNIQUE I'VE SHOWN YOU.
HOWEVER, THE KILLER'S IAI...
SIGN: SANGAKUEN NO TACHI*
*A TECHNIQUE OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE.

THAT IS SURELY THE REASON WHY KIKUTO LOST.
MIND READING ... ENCHANTMENT TECHNIQUE ...
MR. YAMAZAKI. PLACE YOUR SWORD 1.5 CM ABOVE MY HEAD AND TRY TO STRIKE ME.
1.5 CM ABOVE YOUR HEAD ...?
...

ATTACK WHENEVER YOU WANT!
WHEN-EVER I WANT ...
HE'S GOING TO KILL THE YOUNG TEACHER ...

FWAMPT!!
A HIT ON THE WRIST WITH THE BLADE FACING UP.
GOOD ...
EVERYONE UNDERSTOOD HOW DANGEROUS THE SWORD THIEF IS, AND ARE TRYING TO AVOID GOING OUT AFTER DARK.

BUT STILL, HE MUST BE DEALT WITH AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
YES!
IF I BLINDLY GO AT HIM, HE WILL JUST USE HIS TRICKS ON ME ...
THE THIEF MUST BE AN EXPERT MIND READER!
WHOSE IAI DO YOU THINK IS STRONGER, YOUNG MASTER? YOURS OR THE KILLER'S?
THE SWORD IS WORTH A LOT OF MONEY, SO HE'LL MOST LIKELY SELL IT.
FIRST ...
IF I DON'T GET BACK KIKUTO'S SWORD AND LAY IT ON HIS GRAVE, HIS SOUL WILL BE RESTLESS.
AND VISIT EVERY SWORD VENDOR IN EDO...
UNTIL WE FIND A FILED-DOWN KIYOMITSU SWORD!
TOMORROW WE WILL SPLIT UP ...

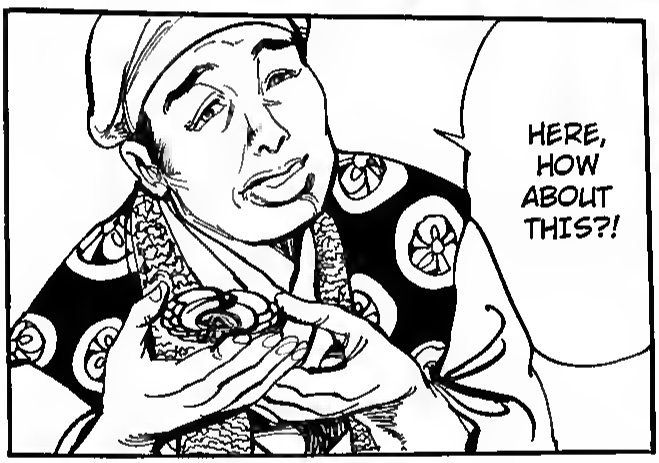

萬玄堂
刀剣諸工作
土方屋
WELCOME !!
SIGN: MANGENDO:- SWORD WORKSHOP, CONSTRUCTION
RENYA VISITS THE THIRD SWORD VENDOR THAT DAY ...
CURTAIN: SWORDS

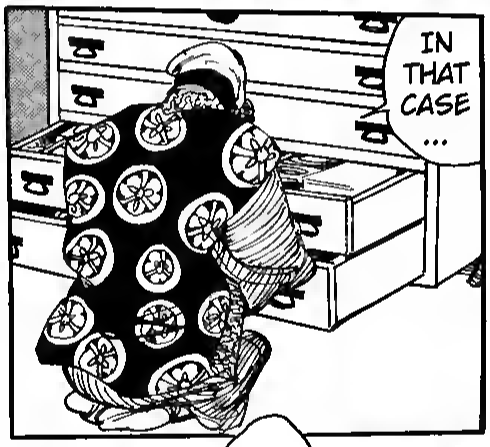
I'M LOOKING FOR A STANDARD-LENGTH* SWORD ...
IN WHAT PRICE RANGE ...?
*STANDARD LENGTH: 71.5C

I WAS HOPING FOR A CLEAR FERRITE SWORD FROM AROUND THE EIROKU* ERA...
HOW ABOUT THIS SWORD THEN?!
KIKUTO'S KIYOMITSU!
WOOW, WHAT A GREAT SWORD.
IT JUST CAME IN!
A RONIN WHOM I'VE NEVER SEEN BEFORE SOLD IT TO ME.
DIDN'T IT COME WITH ANY FITTINGS?
UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S BEEN SOLD TO ME AS YOU SEE IT NOW!
* EIROKU ERA: 1558 - 1570

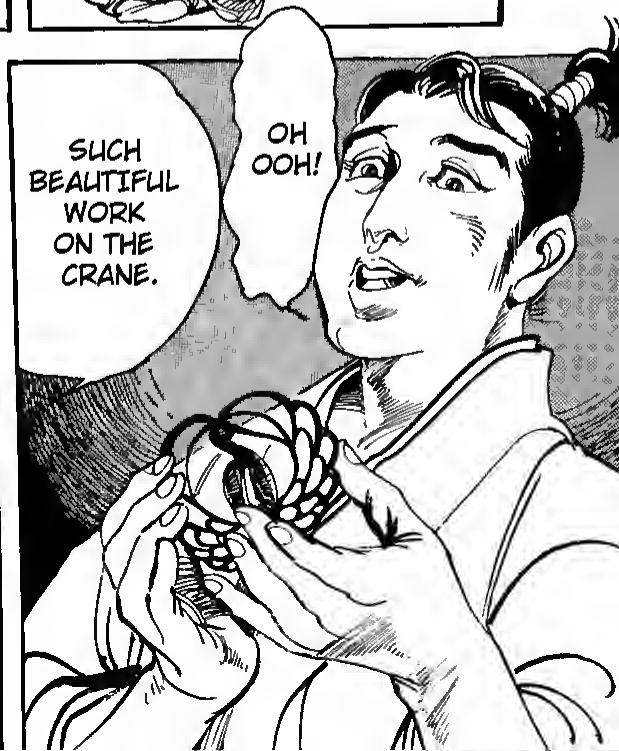
HMM, AN ECHIZEN GUARD.
BUT I HAPPEN TO LIKE HIGO GUARDS.
WHAT A GREAT EYE YOU HAVE!

HOW ABOUT THIS GUARD? IT MATCHES THE SWORD WELL.
IN THAT CASE, I WILL ALSO NEED SOME METAL FIXTURES TO GO WITH IT...


HERE, HOW ABOUT THIS?!


IN THAT CASE ...

IT'S A TREASURED ITEM I ACQUIRED SOME YEARS AGO!
YOU SURE DO HAVE GREAT THINGS IN YOUR STORE.


SUCH BEAUTIFUL WORK ON THE CRANE.
OH OOH!

I'VE CAUGHT YOU!
HUH?
HEHE... THAT SURE WAS A LUCKY PURCHASE.
SOME YEARS AGO, EH ...?
BOUGHT IT "SOME YEARS AGO"!
YOU COULD NOT HAVE ...
TEN DAYS AGO I SAW FOR MYSELF THIS VERY GUARD ATTACHED TO THIS BIZEN SWORD.
WHY DID YOU LIE TO ME ...?
TMP!
HA!
DASH!

ドッ
FWAMPT!
TINK!
キンッ!

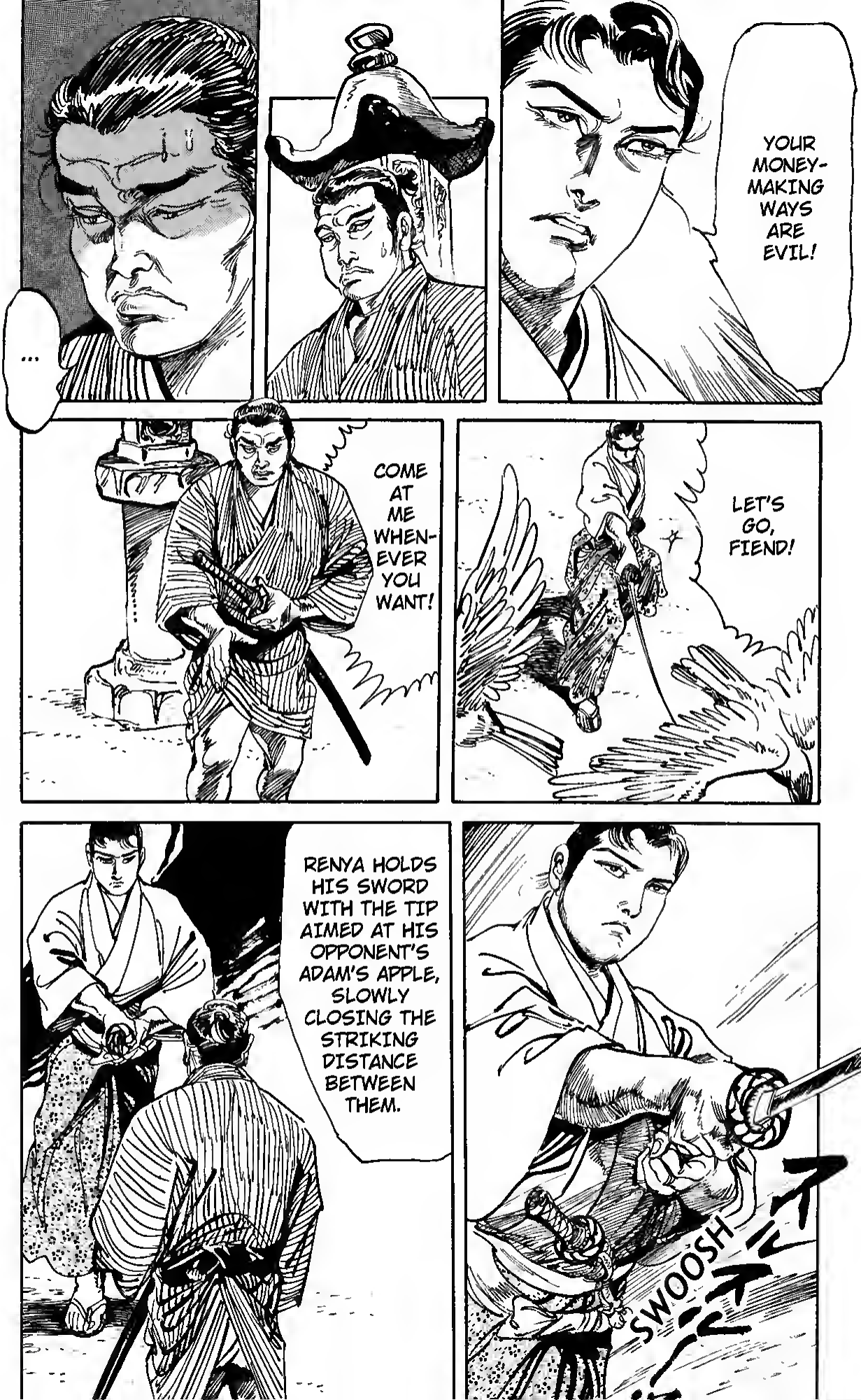
SHOULD NOT BE ABLE TO MOVE LIKE THAT!
A MERE SWORD VENDOR ...
WHO'S BEEN STEALING THE SWORDS?
ARE YOU THE ONE ...
TAKE YOUR WEAPON ...
AND FOLLOW ME!
I ALSO LIVE BY THE SWORD ...
I COULD DEAL WITH YOU HERE AND NOW BUT...
SHHWOOP

WHY ...

ARROGANCE IN VICTORY IS A SHAMEFUL THING!
NEVER-THELESS ...

HAVE GROWN ARROGANT AND LAZY!
WHILE THE CHILDREN AND GRAND-CHILDREN OF THE OSAKA SAMURAI HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO POVERTY! DID YOU KNOW THAT?!
THE CHILDREN OF THE TOKUGAWA SAMURAI WHO'VE DEFEATED THE OSAKA FORCES ...

ARE YOU KILLING PEOPLE CONNECTED WITH THE TOKUGAWA FAMILY?


...
YOUR MONEY-MAKING WAYS ARE EVIL!
COME AT ME WHEN-EVER YOU WANT!
LET'S GO, FIEND!
RENYA HOLDS HIS SWORD WITH THE TIP AIMED AT HIS OPPONENT'S ADAM'S APPLE, SLOWLY CLOSING THE STRIKING DISTANCE BETWEEN THEM.
SWOOSH

15 MINUTES HAVE PASSED ...
HEHE ... GO ON, STRIKE ME!
OR, IF YOU'RE AFRAID TO SWING YOUR SWORD, YOU CAN TRY A THRUST!

BUT RENYA COULDN'T MOVE A MUSCLE.
HE COULDN'T ATTACK FIRST.
ANOTHER 15 MINUTES HAD PASSED ...
RENYA REALIZED THAT HE WAS AT A DISADVAN-TAGE!
HIS STANCE TRANSFERRED THE ENTIRE WEIGHT OF HIS SWORD TO HIS ARMS.
HE WAS GETTING TIRED.
JUST THEN, EVER SO SLIGHTLY, RENYA HAD...
HIS ENEMY ...
GRIN
SMILED WITH CONTEMPT!
BEGUN MOVING THE TIP OF HIS SWORD TO THE RIGHT ...
AND SIGNALED AN ATTACK!

THE SWIFT* SWORDSMAN DREW HIS SWORD AND AIMED IT AT THE BACK OF RENYA'S LEFT WRIST!
TO CUT UPWARDS, HE TURNED HIS SWORD BLADE-SIDE DOWN AS SOON AS IT WAS DRAWN.
AT THE SAME TIME, RENYA DROPS THE TIP OF HIS SWORD EVER SO SLIGHTLY!

* THE BODY AND THE LEGS ALL MOVE IN UNISON, AIMING THE TIP OF THE SWORD AT THE OPPONENT.

ドバーッ
GWAAASH!
UGH! A SPLENDID COUNTER ...
YOU HAVE BEATEN MY TECHNIQUE. WHO IN THE WORLD ARE YOU?
TOSHIKANE YAGYU OF OWARI.
HMPH. AN OWARI SWORD MASTER.
I'VE HEARD YOUR NAME BEFORE!
AND YOU ARE?
I AM THE BASTARD CHILD OF THE OSAKA GENERAL SAEMON-NO-KAMI HARUNAGA ONO. MY NAME IS HIJINOSUKE SHIGEO ONO!
I'VE MADE IT MY MISSION IN LIFE TO SUPPORT MY FATHER'S SURVIVING RETAINERS HOWEVER I CAN!

YOU SHOULD LEAVE EDO RIGHT NOW!
AS LONG AS I GET THE SWORD BACK, THERE WILL BE NO REASON TO TAKE YOUR LIFE.
UNTIL I FINALLY TURNED TO STEALING SWORDS ...
BUT EVERYTHING IS SO EXPENSIVE NOWADAYS. ONE AFTER ANOTHER I'VE ENCOUNTERED PEOPLE ON THE VERGE OF STARVATION... I COULD NOT BEAR IT...
.....
YOU CAN OPEN A NEW STORE IN ANOTHER CITY.
I'M NOT GOING ANY-WHERE!
IT MUST BE BY YOUR HANDS, SIR YAGYU!
SEND ME TO THE OTHER WORLD, TO MY FATHER!
A LOST RIGHT ARM MEANS THE END FOR ME ...
I AM A SAMURAI, A SWORDS-MAN!
WWSSSHHHHWWW

●【第八話】完●

CHAPTER 8 - FIN

CHAPTER 9: LOVE, LEG-CUTTING SWORD

「第九話」恋情（れんじょう）、足斬り剣

A STANCE RIGHT BEFORE FENDING OFF A FRONTAL ATTACK AND, WHILST PULLING HIS LEFT LEG BACK, ATTEMPTING TO CUT HIS OPPONENT'S SHOULDER.

AT THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE DOJO NEAR THE OWARI SPARE RESIDENCE ...
新陰流道場
SIGN: SHIN-KAGE STYLE DOJO
NOT MANY OF THEM BUT THAT INCLUDES SAMURAI FROM OTHER PROVINCES AND RONIN

* A BAMBOO SWORD COVERED BY A LEATHER SLEEVE. OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO NOBUTSUNA KAMIIZUMI.

* A HIGH RANK IN THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE.

OUT OF EVERYONE GATHERED HERE, THE ONLY ONES ALLOWED TO DIRECTLY CROSS THEIR BAMBOO SWORDS WITH RENYA WERE THE 28 WARRIORS WHO'VE REACHED "TENGU SHOUOKU.*"
HOWEVER, EVEN THEY ...
NEXT! MR. SOMEYA!
ONLY THREE PEOPLE WERE EVER ABLE TO HIT RENYA'S SWORD FROM TIME TO TIME.
FELL ONE BY ONE WITHOUT EVEN BEING ABLE TO HIT RENYA'S SWORD.
AMONG THEM WAS TOSHIZO KOZAKURA ...
A SAMURAI OF THE LOWEST RANK.

WHAM!

IT WOULD SEEM SO ...

I WON! I'M THE WINNER!

TWICK!
"IT WOULD SEEM SO"?! WHY YOU... HAVEN'T YOU BEEN HIT ENOUGH?!
I'LL BE YOUR NEXT OPPONENT THEN! COME!

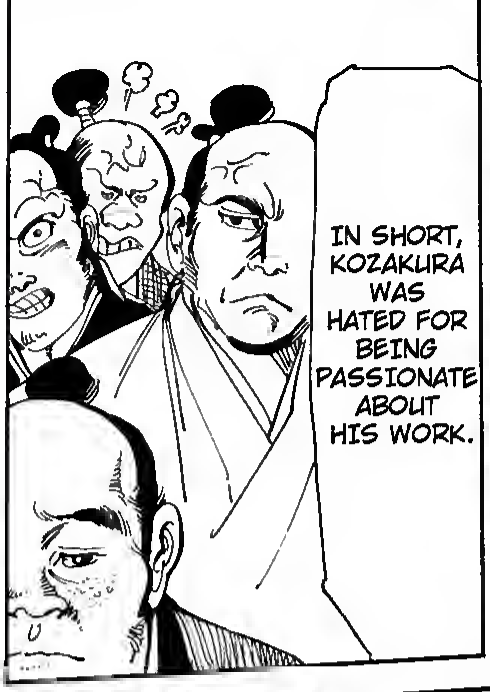
HMPH... A PERFECT HIT TO THE SHOULDER!
BAM!!
IT WOULD SEEM SO ...
B-BASTARD! WHAT ARE YOU STILL MUTTERING ABOUT ?!
WAIT!
KNOW YOUR PLACE, YOU LITTLE SHIT!

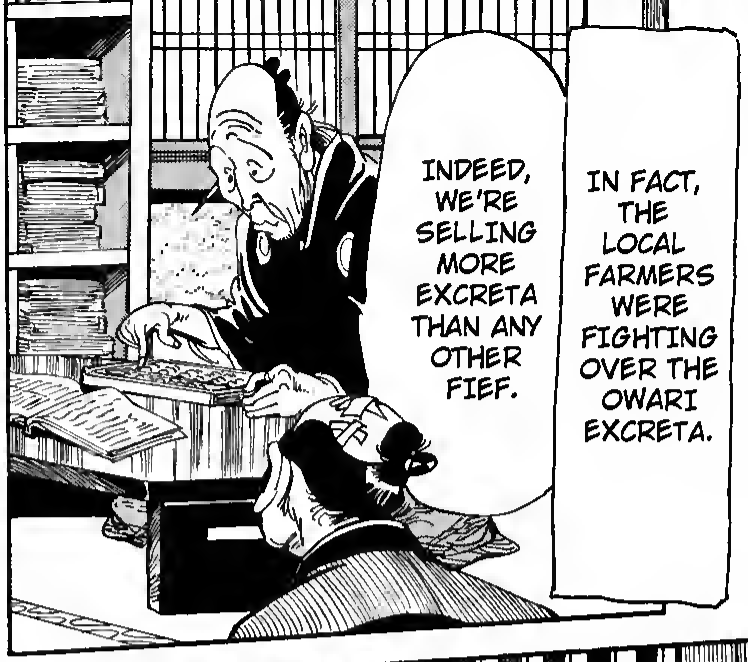
MR. SUDO, YOU HAVE LOST THIS MATCH.
BEFORE YOU EXECUTED YOUR SHOULDER STRIKE, MR. KOZAKURA HIT YOU ON THE LEG WITH HIS SWORD.
SAME WITH MR. ONO.
B... BUT!
IN TERMS OF POWER, I AM THE CLEAR WINNER!
HIS SWORD ONLY TOUCHED ME A LITTLE BIT!
AS AM I!
WITH PRACTICE SWORDS, YES. BUT IF IT'S BEEN A REAL SWORD, YOUR ANKLE WOULD HAVE BEEN CUT IN HALF.
IF YOUR ANKLE WAS CUT, YOU WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO EXECUTE YOUR ATTACK AND FALL OVER.
THAT IS WHY MR. KOZAKURA IS THE WINNER OF THIS MATCH.

chatter
IF YOU'RE SHORT OF HEIGHT.
DROPPING DOWN AND CUTTING THE LEG IS EASIER ...
BUT THAT'S NOT ALL. MR. KOZAKURA SEEMS TO BE HIDING POTENTIALLY LIMITLESS SKILLS...
NEXT MONTH, I ...
WHAT THE HELL DOES "YES" MEAN?!
HEY, KOZAKURA! WHEN WILL YOU PAY BACK THE MONEY YOU OWE?!
YES ...
IT'S ALWAYS "NEXT MONTH," "NEXT MONTH"! IT'S BEEN HALF A YEAR ALREADY!

SPLASH!
MONKEY BASTARD!
AS EXPECTED FROM A PATHETIC PIECE OF TRASH THAT PLAYS DIRTY IN THE DOJO!
YOU HAVEN'T PAID ME BACK AS WELL!
BAM!
WHOOP!
WHOOP!
TOSHIZO KOZAKURA WAS ASSIGNED TO PRIVY DUTY IN ALL OF THE VILLAS.
OTHER THAN CLEANING THE PRIVIES AND REPLENISHING THE TOILET PAPER...
PRIVY DUTY INCLUDED INSTRUCTING FARMERS WHO CAME TO COLLECT MANURE.

THE HATCH IS OPENED!
HEY! WHO'S THERE?!
HE INSISTED ON FISHING OUT THE TOILET PAPER FROM THE PRIVY POTS.
HOWEVER, KOZAKURA HAD A PECULIAR FIXATION.
YES, THAT IS WHY I DO IT FIRST THING IN THE MORNING ...
EVERY-ONE ELSE IS ANGRY, THOUGH ...
BUT DISPOSING OF THE PAPER MAKES FOR BETTER MANURE AND IT MAKES THE FARMERS HAPPY ...
YES ...
I TOLD YOU TO STOP DOING THAT ...
FOREMAN
STOP PEEPING IN ON THE PRIVY POTS! I DON'T WANT YOU LOOKING AT MY SHIT!
I'M ONLY INTERESTED IN THE PAPER ...
YOU'VE SEEN MY BEHIND, BASTARD!
SOME PEOPLE LIKE TO USE THE PRIVY IN THE MORNING TOO!


IN SHORT, KOZAKURA WAS HATED FOR BEING PASSIONATE ABOUT HIS WORK.


INDEED, WE'RE SELLING MORE EXCRETA THAN ANY OTHER FIEF.
IN FACT, THE LOCAL FARMERS WERE FIGHTING OVER THE OWARI EXCRETA.

I HEARD SOME OUTSIDERS SAY THAT THIS CLAN'S PRIVIES ARE THE CLEANEST THEY'VE EVER SEEN.
PRIVIES ARE WHERE MANURE IS MADE, SO THEY ARE VERY IMPORTANT PLACES ...

I ALSO DON'T HAVE MUCH MONEY BUT ...
I COULD LEND YOU SOME.

YOU ...
ARE QUITE IN DEBT, AREN'T YOU, MR. KOZAKURA?
...

THE INTEREST RATES ... ARE JUST SO HIGH ...
KOZA-KURA ...
DODGED ONE OF HIS PUNCHES.
HALF A MONTH LATER, WHEN SUDO WAS ABUSING KOZAKURA ABOUT HIS DEBT...
YOU FUCKING BASTARD!
SUDO TUMBLED OVER AND FELL TO THE GROUND.

AH!!
FWWWSH!
AFTER THAT, TOSHIZO KOZAKURA DISAPPEARED.
ACCORDING TO THE LAWS OF THE WARRIOR CLASS, TO DEFY ONE'S SUPERIOR OR KILL A HIGHER-CLASS WARRIOR WITHOUT A JUST REASON, IS AN UNFORGIVABLE CRIME.
THUS, INSPECTOR JIN'EMON OGATA ORDERED TO FIND KOZAKURA.

HAVE YOU FOUND HIM, YAJIMA?
WE KNOW WHERE HE'S BEEN!
WHAT ?!
A BROTHEL IN SHINAGAWA ?!
WITH A PROSTITUTE ?!
IT APPEARS HE WAS CLOSE TO ONE OF THE PROSTITUTES THERE SO HE THREATENED HER MASTER TO BURN THE GIRL'S CONTRACT BEFORE ESCAPING WITH HER.
HMMM... EVEN THE CRIME OF HELPING A PROSTITUTE ESCAPE ISN'T BELOW HIM ...
THEY WERE LAST SEEN HEADING WEST ON THE TOKAIDO TRAIL.
THE BOHACHI* CHASED HIM WITH SWORDS AND SPEARS BUT HE MADE SHORT WORK OF THEM.
LOOKING AT HIM YOU WOULDN'T THINK THAT HE WAS CAPABLE OF RUNNING OFF WITH A WOMAN BUT...

* PEOPLE WHO HAVE ABANDONED THE MORAL PATH.

INSPECTOR, THIS IS A CRIME WORTHY OF BOUNDING* AND DECAPITATION.
NO. SUDO HAS HABITUALLY BEEN LENDING MONEY AT HIGH INTEREST RATES TO EVERYONE, EVEN TO MERCHANTS. HE WAS ALSO THE ONE WHO DREW HIS SWORD FIRST.
BOTH THE GREAT LORD AND THE YOUNG LORD ...
HAVE REQUESTED THAT KOZAKURA BE ALLOWED TO HONORABLY COMMIT SEPPUKU, IN RECOGNITION OF HIS FAITHFUL SERVICE.
* TO BE BOUND BY ROPE IS A SIGN OF GREAT DISHONOR FOR A SAMURAI.
LET'S GO!
YEAH! IF HE RESISTS, WE'LL CUT HIM DOWN!
GWOH!
WAIT, PLEASE.
NEEEIGH

IN MY OPINION, TOSHIZO KOZAKURA IS A DECEITFULLY SKILLFUL SWORDSMAN.
IF HE RESISTS, I BELIEVE ALL FOUR OF YOU WILL BE IN DANGER.
WHAT IMPERTINENCE! YOU MIGHT ALL BE SHIN-KAGE STYLE USERS BUT WE ARE ITTO STYLE WARRIORS!
DO NOT DOUBT OUR SKILLS!!
OF COURSE.
I WOULD NEVER DO THAT, HOWEVER ...
THEN, SIR YAGYU!
HOW MANY PEOPLE DO YOU THINK WE'LL NEED?!
ON THE OTHER HAND ...
EVEN FIVE OR SIX WOULDN'T BE ENOUGH.
TO SIC 10 OR MORE WARRIORS ON ONE MAN WOULD BRING DISGRACE TO THIS CLAN'S MILITARY RENOWN.
FURTHERMORE, KOZAKURA IS A PRACTITIONER OF MY SHIN-KAGE STYLE. SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITY ...
LIES WITH ME.
HMPH.

I BEG YOU TO ORDER ME TO DEAL WITH THIS SITUATION ...
KLAK-KLAK
IF HE LEFT SHINAGAWA THREE DAYS AGO AND IS TRAVELING WITH A WOMAN, THEN HE SHOULDN'T HAVE REACHED ISEHARA YET.

THE NEXT DAY ...
RENYA ARRIVED AT ATSUGI.
HE LEFT HIS HORSE AT THE STABLES ...
BECAUSE THE SOUND OF ITS HOOVES WOULD GIVE HIS POSITION AWAY.
KOZAKURA HAS BEEN STUDYING MILITARY TACTICS FOR YEARS ...
SO THEY WOULD NOT BE STAYING AT AN INN WHERE THEIR PURSUERS COULD EASILY FIND THEM.
THEY ALSO DEFINITELY DID NOT ESCAPE LOOKING LIKE A SAMURAI AND A PROSTITUTE.

TO A WARRIOR, EVERYTHING IS TRAINING. LOOKING FOR KOZAKURA WAS ALSO A PART OF THE ART OF WAR.
RENYA TURNED OVER EVERY CORNER IN ATSUGI, ASKING EVERYONE QUESTIONS.

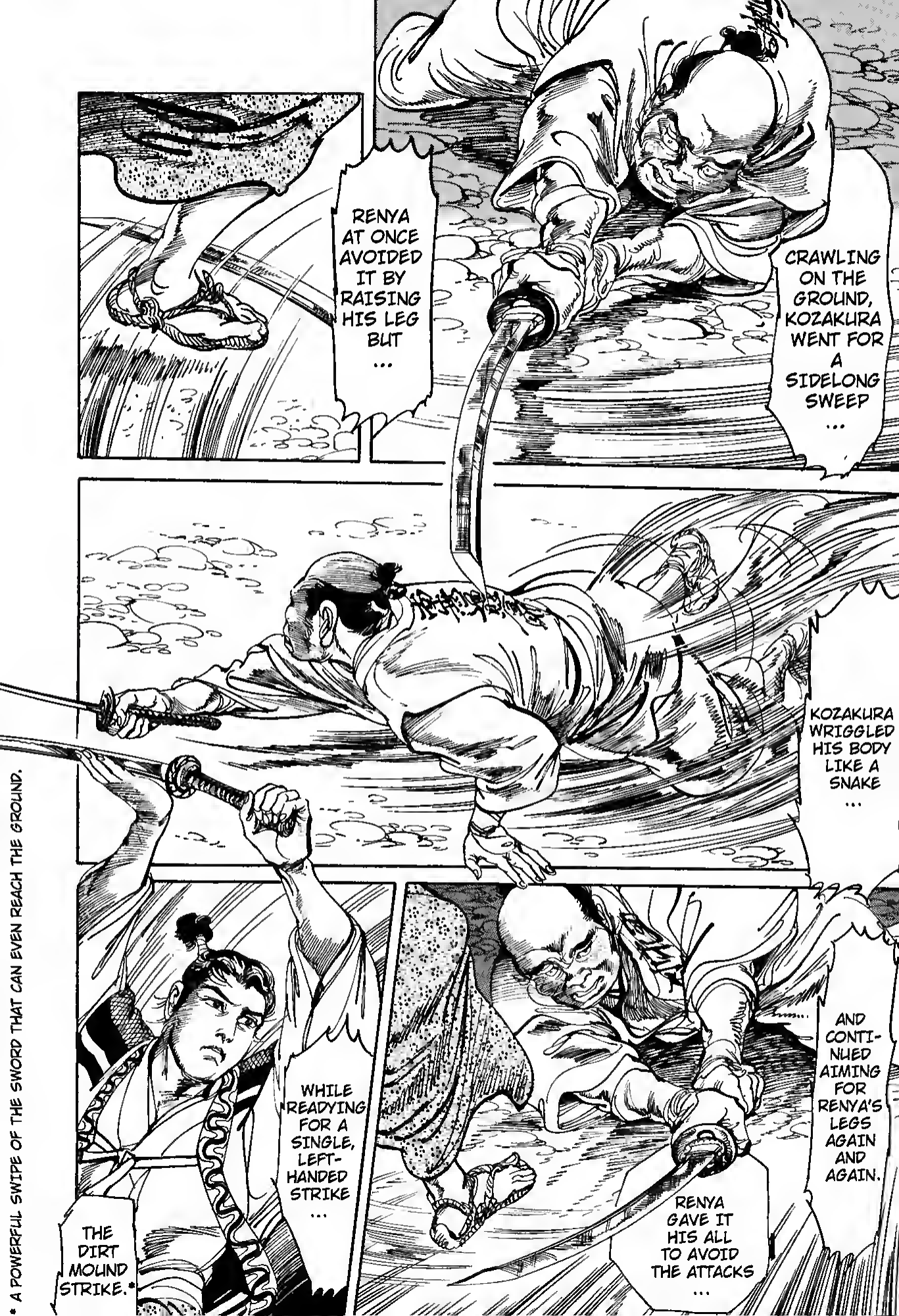
...
I'VE RECOGNIZED YOU BY YOUR BUILD.
MR. KOZAKURA.
YOUNG TEACHER.
MR. KOZAKURA... KILLING A FELLOW WARRIOR IS A SERIOUS CRIME
SQWUA SQWUA
BUT YOU'VE BEEN ALLOWED TO COMMIT SEPPUKU. WOULD YOU PLEASE RETURN WITH ME?
I CANNOT.
UP UNTIL NOW I HAVE DEVOTED MYSELF TO AND LIVED BY THE SWORD ...
BUT NOW, I WANT TO TRY LEADING A DIFFERENT LIFE.
YOU FELL IN LOVE ...
...
LOVING A WOMAN IS A GOOD THING... BUT VISITING BROTHELS UNTIL YOU FALL INTO DEBT...
DOES NOT BEFIT A WARRIOR OR A SAMURAI.

IF YOU SAY YOU WON'T GO BACK NO MATTER WHAT ...
I CANNOT GO BACK.
KLIK
DUN!
I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO FIGHT YOU RIGHT HERE.
PLEASE WAIT!
TMP TMP
NO TOES.

AND THE WARRIOR CODE HAS VERY STRICT RULES!
THIS MAN IS A WARRIOR!
STAY BACK, OTAMI!
I BEG YOU, PLEASE LET MR. TOSHI GO... PLEASE!
I WILL NOT LOSE TO YOU.
I TRULY AM SORRY BUT ...
HOWEVER, YOUNG TEACHER ...
I AM SADDENED THAT I HAVE TO CLASH REAL SWORDS WITH YOU...

RARELY SHOW OTHER PEOPLE ...
I KNOW THAT. SWORDSMEN ...
THEIR SECRET TECHNIQUES.
ARE NOTHING LIKE WHAT YOU'VE SEEN IN THE DOJO.
MY TRUE SKILLS ...
GWOOOH!
SHWHHS

AND SIGNALED THAT HE WAS GOING TO STRIKE THE LEG.
IN THAT INSTANT, KOZAKURA CROUCHED QUICKLY...
RENYA READ HIS INTENTIONS AND ATTEMPTED A SIDELONG SWEEP TO PAR.
DOWN THERE, RENYA'S SWORD COULD NOT REACH HIM, EVEN IF HE BROUGHT IT COMPLETELY DOWN.
THAT'S BECAUSE BY THEN KOZAKURA WAS CLINGING TO THE GROUND.
BUT HE ONLY MANAGED TO CUT THE AIR.


RENYA AT ONCE AVOIDED IT BY RAISING HIS LEG BUT ...
CRAWLING ON THE GROUND, KOZAKURA WENT FOR A SIDELONG SWEEP ...
KOZAKURA WRIGGLED HIS BODY LIKE A SNAKE ...
AND CONTI-NUED AIMING FOR RENYA'S LEGS AGAIN AND AGAIN.
RENYA GAVE IT HIS ALL TO AVOID THE ATTACKS ...
WHILE READYING FOR A SINGLE, LEFT-HANDED STRIKE ...
THE DIRT MOUND STRIKE.*

* A POWERFUL SWIPE OF THE SWORD THAT CAN EVEN REACH THE GROUND.

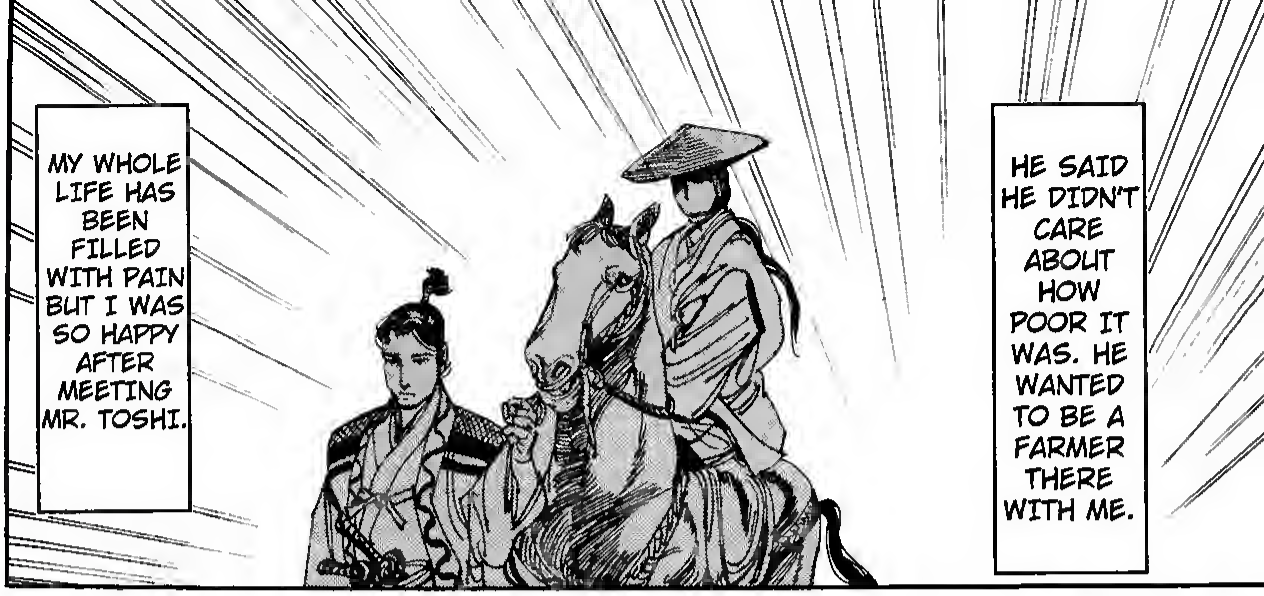
RENYA THOUGHT THAT KOZAKURA WILL BE CUT IN HALF BUT, SOMEHOW, HE IMMEDIATELY GOT UP ON HIS FEET...
AND BLOCKED RENYA'S ATTACK!
SHHWS. WHHHSH
DUN DUN
RENYA DID NOT EXPECT KOZAKURA TO DIVE TO THE GROUND LIKE THAT.

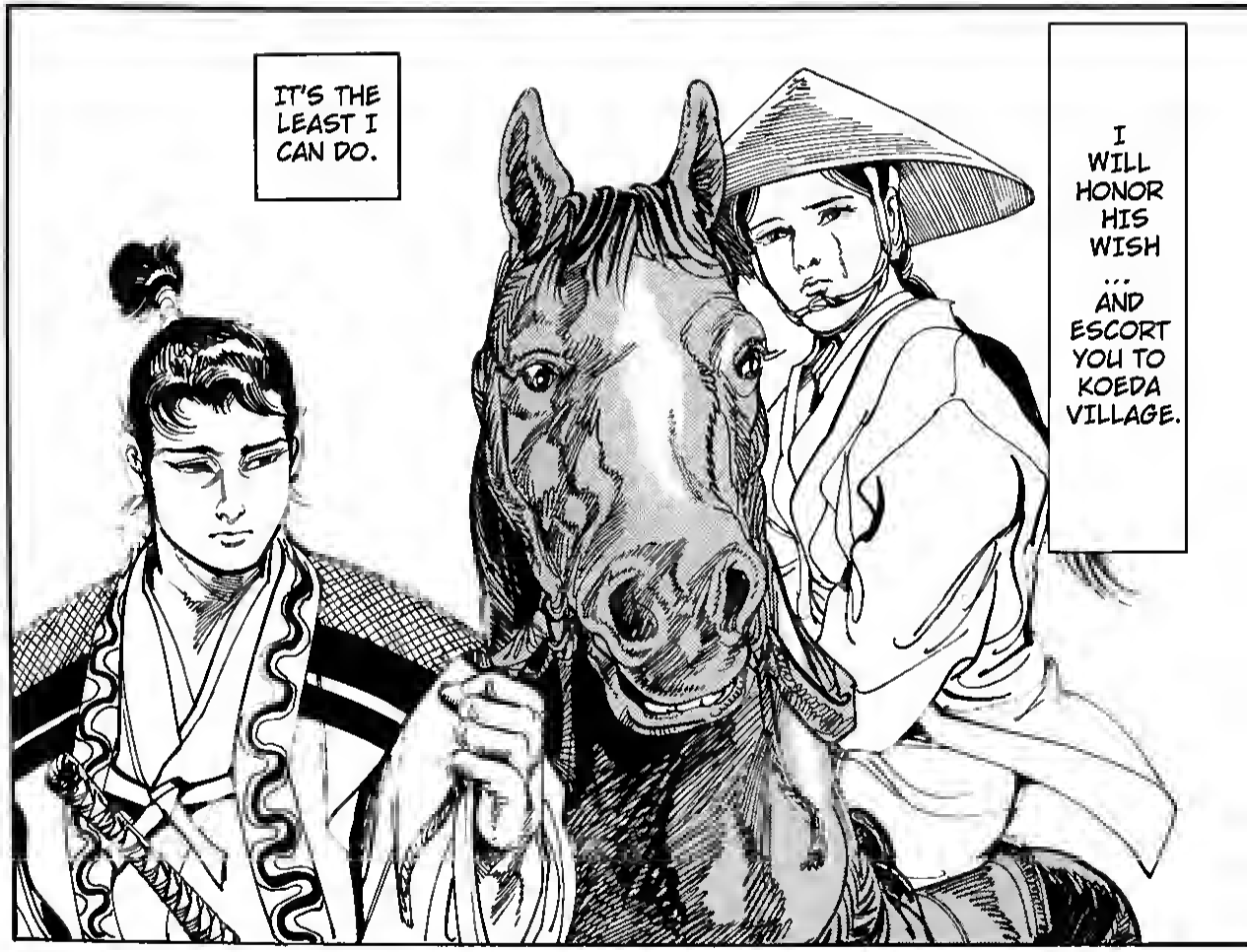
AN IMPOSSIBLE TECHNIQUE!
IT WAS PROBABLY DUE TO HIS SHORT LEGS. SOMETHING HE MUST HAVE PUT GREAT EFFORT INTO PERFECTING WHILE NOBODY AROUND HIM NOTICED.
HE ALSO COULD NOT EXPLAIN HOW HE GOT UP SO SWIFTLY!
ジリリッ
STEP *STEP*
KOZAKURA BROUGHT HIS SWORD DOWN ...
THEN TURNED IT OVER AND CUT UPWARDS!

KOZAKURA APPEARED TO BE GOING DOWN.
RENYA AIMED FOR HIS LEFT FOOT WITH A RIGHT-HANDED SWIPE...
JUST WHEN KOZAKURA'S BODY REACHED THE GROUND.
FWWWSH!
THE TIP OF RENYA'S SWORD CUT THROUGH KOZAKURA'S VITAL POINTS.

MR. TOSHI!
AS EXPECTED FROM THE FIFTH SHIN-KAGE STYLE MASTER...
UGH... HE EASILY READ ALL OF MY MOVES ...
THUMP ドカ
COUGH ゴホ
YOU ARE ...
AT THAT MOMENT, RENYA NOTICED THAT THE GIRL'S EYES WERE CLOUDED AND THAT SHE COULDN'T SEE.
TOOK HER PUPILS.
HER RIGHT TOES WERE CUT OFF AFTER SHE TRIED TO ESCAPE... LATER, AN EPIDEMIC ...
WHEN SHE WAS 12, OTAMI WAS KIDNAPPED AND SOLD TO A BROTHEL.
SHE WAS THEN RESOLD AGAIN AND AGAIN BEFORE FINALLY ARRIVING IN SHINAGAWA.

FWOP
I WAS SO HAPPY ...
BUT THANKS TO THAT... SHE COULDN'T SEE HOW UGLY I WAS... HAHAHA...
NOO... MR. TOSHI...!!
MR. TOSHI TRIED TO GET ME BACK HOME, TO KOEDA VILLAGE IN SURUGA TOMIZAWA.


MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN FILLED WITH PAIN BUT I WAS SO HAPPY AFTER MEETING MR. TOSHI.
HE SAID HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT HOW POOR IT WAS. HE WANTED TO BE A FARMER THERE WITH ME.


IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO.
I WILL HONOR HIS WISH ... AND ESCORT YOU TO KOEDA VILLAGE.

FIN
完
CHAPTER 9 FIN

●[第九話]完●

CHAPTER 10: TRIPLE-BARREL RAPID FIRE

第十話 三連射

* TOSHIKANE – LATER KNOWN AS RENYASAI

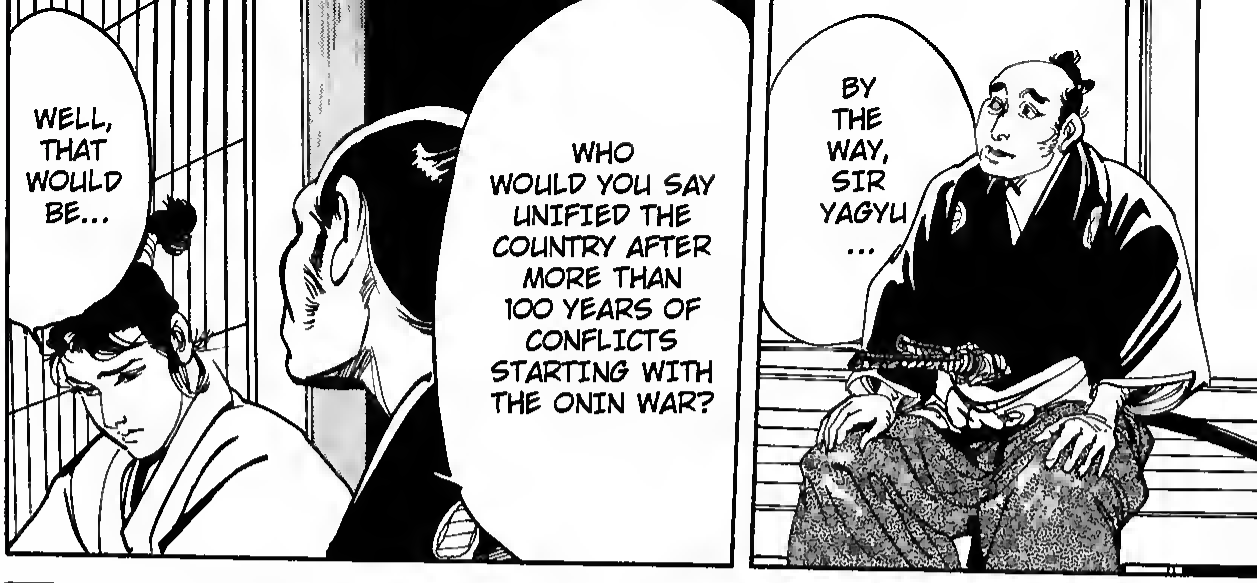
YOU'VE NEVER PRACTICED WITH ONE OF THESE?
I'M AFRAID I'M A SWORDSMAN SO...
WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT A TRY?
NO, I HAVE BUT, WHEN IT COMES TO PROJECTILE WEAPONS... I'M JUST USELESS...
ONCE A MONTH, RENYA TAUGHT KENJUTSU TO THE WORKERS OF THE BISHU SHOP IN KAWASAKI.

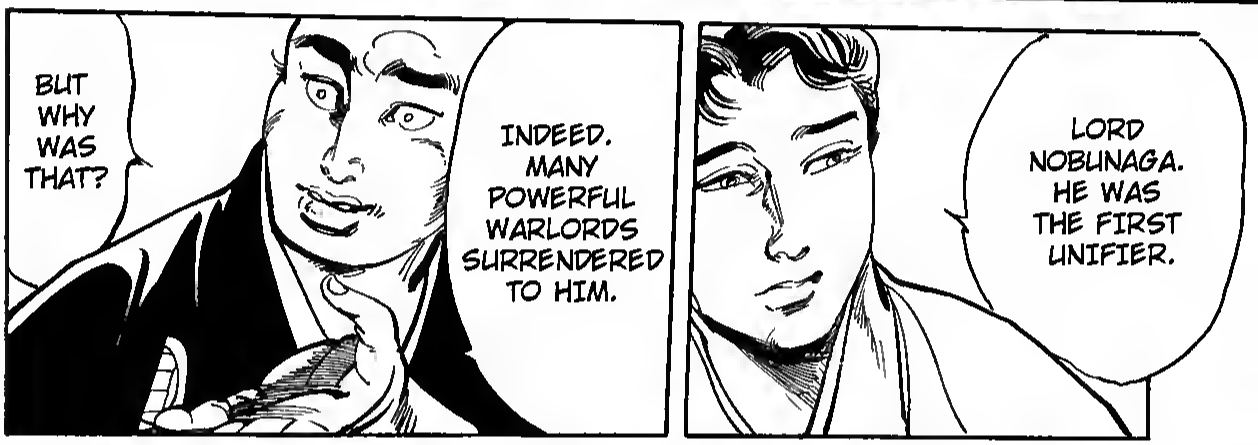
THEY ALSO SOLD THE FAMED OWARI CLAMS.
THE BISHU SHOP WASN'T JUST GOVERNMENT LODGINGS FOR OWARI OFFICIALS.
ON HIS WAY BACK, RENYA REGULARLY STRAYED FROM THE TOKAIDO TRAIL AND TOOK A SHORTCUT.
WWWWSHHH
HIS SHARP SENSES WARNED HIM THAT HE WAS IN DANGER.
SUDDENLY, RENYA SMELLED SMOKE.

BWOOOOOOOOON
I WONDER WHO HE IS.
RENYA CALMLY STOOD UP, KNOWING THAT IT WOULD BE SOME TIME BEFORE THE SHOOTER COULD RELOAD HIS WEAPON.
BUT THE MAN WITH THE GUN DID NOT TRY TO RUN AWAY. HE GOT CLOSER TO RENYA.
KA-POW!

KLAK!
HE-HE-HE ...
BWOOOOON
RAPID FIRE... SO IT IS POSSIBLE ...!

HELLO.
OH.
HELLO.
IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY. SIR YAGYU IS A GENIUS WHO EXCELS EVEN AT DESIGNING GARDENS.
HMM.
THE YOUNG LORD HAS REQUESTED THAT CHANGES BE MADE TO A PART OF THE GARDEN.
YES.
OHOOH. IS THAT THE GARDEN?
I WAS THINKING ABOUT PUTTING LANTERNS HERE WITH PINE TREES IN THE BACK.


BY THE WAY, SIR YAGYU ...
WHO WOULD YOU SAY UNIFIED THE COUNTRY AFTER MORE THAN 100 YEARS OF CONFLICTS STARTING WITH THE ONIN WAR?
WELL, THAT WOULD BE...


LORD NOBUNAGA. HE WAS THE FIRST UNIFIER.
INDEED. MANY POWERFUL WARLORDS SURRENDERED TO HIM.
BUT WHY WAS THAT?

SURELY IT WAS BECAUSE HE WAS THE FIRST TO UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF THE HARQUEBUS, SKILLFULLY USING IT ON THE BATTLEFIELD.
DI-DAT!
AS EXPECTED FROM SIR YAGYU!
THAT'S CORRECT!

THEN WHY DO I HEAR THAT YOU DON'T LIKE FIREARMS?
...

IT'S A SIMPLE TOOL USED BY WARRIORS SINCE ANCIENT TIMES.
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. ISN'T A SWORD A MACHINE FOR KILLING PEOPLE...?
IT'S NOT A COMPLICATED PIECE OF MACHINERY.
I SIMPLY DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF USING A MACHINE TO KILL A PERSON.
JUST THE ADVANCEMENT OF MACHINES MADE FOR KILLING PEOPLE.
ARE YOU AGAINST THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TOOLS?!
GWOOOOOOH!
THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THIS MILITARY GOVERNMENT YOU SERVE AS A WARRIOR ...
HAHAHA... AREN'T YOU JUST BEING OLD-FASHIONED?

RATATATATATA
BOTH LORD GONGEN AND LORD NOBUNAGA KNEW HOW TO SKILLFULLY USE FIREARMS IN BATTLE!
WERE ALL MADE POSSIBLE BECAUSE ...
YES.
HUH?
I BELIEVE THAT PEACE CAN BE PROTECTED IF STATESMAN SAMURAI STOP PURSUING THEIR SELFISH DESIRES.
AND DON'T YOU THINK FIREARMS ARE THE THINGS THAT PROTECT THAT PEACE?
THEY'VE BROUGHT PEACE TO THE LAND.

I'M TALKING ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF FIREARMS IN THE REAL WORLD!
THUD!
YOU ARE AN IDEALIST!
I STRIVE TO PREVENT THAT FROM HAPPENING AGAIN.
IF A WAR BROKE OUT NOW, WHAT WOULD YOU DO?!
THAT "IF" NEVER HAPPENS.
I STRIVE TO MAKE SURE...
IF! I WANT TO KNOW WHAT IF!
WE'RE DONE HERE!
HUHUH!

RUMOR HAS IT THAT HE IS...
I'VE REALLY MADE HIM ANGRY ...
SNUB
...
PART OF THE MOST POWERFUL MILITARY EXPANSION FACTION IN THE FIEF.
THEY ALSO SAY THAT NEXT SPRING HE WILL SUCCEED HIS UNCLE, LORD UMON KUROKI, AS THE NEW MASTER OF THE GUN.
OH, MR. WAKITA ...
HOW IS YOUR WIFE?
EDO, KANDA, KAJI-CHOU, HOME OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL KUNITOMO BLACKSMITH.*
* FAMED FIREARM MAKERS

NEXT SPRING, WHEN I'M MADE MASTER OF THE GUN AND FIREARM MAGISTRATE, I WILL ORDER 100 OF YOUR GUNS.
HEHE... SHE'S GONE. COULDN'T TAKE THE POVERTY ANYMORE...
WOULDN'T THAT BE NICE...
SEE FOR YOURSELF.
BY THE WAY, HOW'S PROGRESS ON YOUR NEW CREATION?
HEHEH ...
THREE BARRELS?

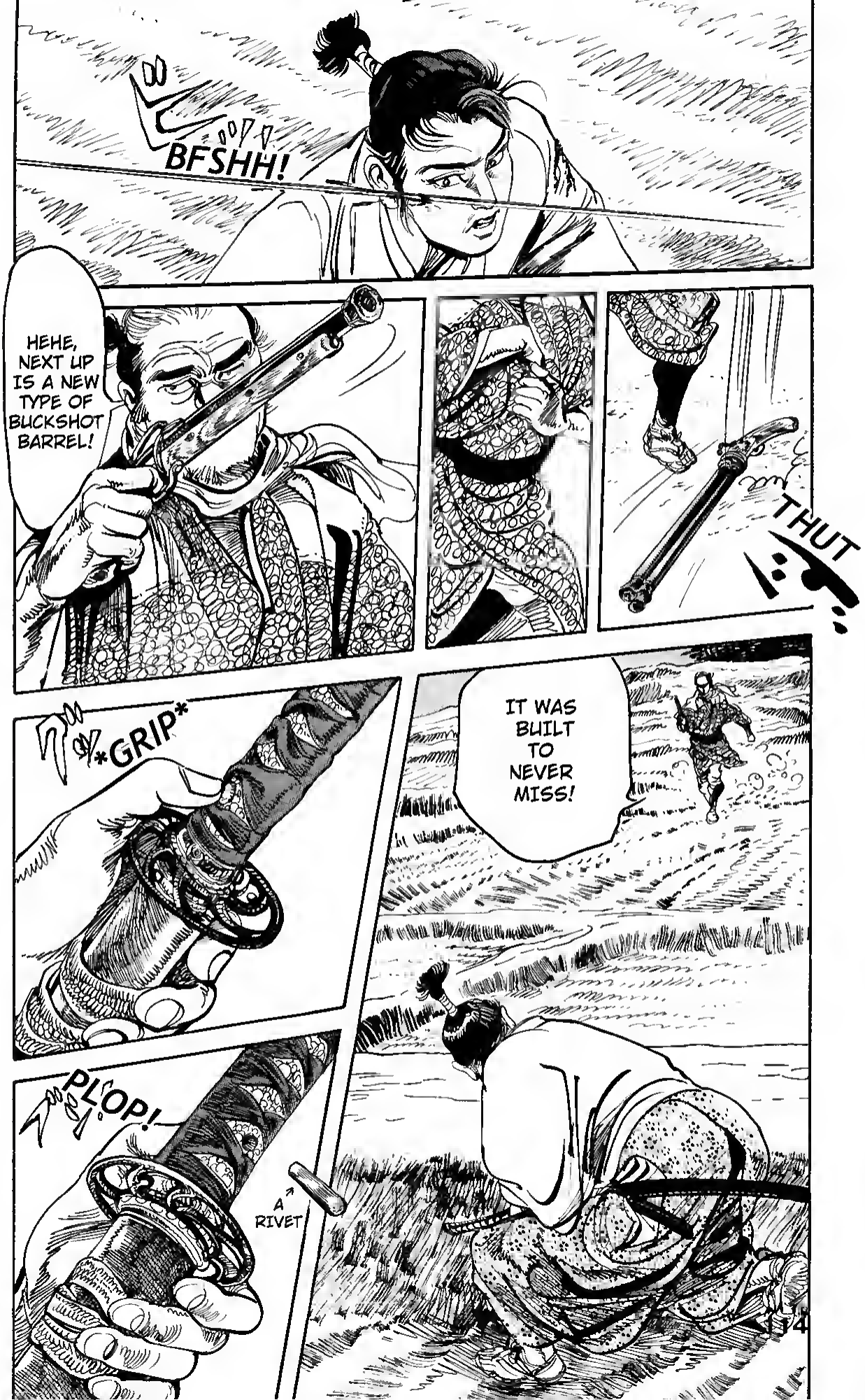
I CALL IT "INVINCIBLE"!
IT ALSO HAS THREE FLASH PANS!
YOU JUST TURN THE BARRELS AFTER EACH SHOT!
BREATH-TAKING!
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FIREARMS IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN SO I HAVEN'T SHOWN THIS TO ANYONE YET, BUT I DID TEST IT OUT.
IT HAS AMAZING FIREPOWER.
A WEAPON THAT CAN SHOOT THREE TIMES IN SUCCESSION
...
AMAZING!
HEEHEEHEE... NOW THE GOVERNMENT JUST NEEDS TO FOLLOW LORD TAIKO'S* EXAMPLE.
DUN!
IF WE MAKE 5,000 'INVINCIBLES" WE CAN EVEN CONQUER CHINA!
THE GREAT NATION OF YAMATO WILL ADVANCE ON THE WORLD!
UUH!

* HIDEYOSHI TOYOTOMI, WARLORD AND POLITICIAN WHO ATTEMPTED TO CONQUER CHINA AND KOREA.

EH! EVEN IN MY OWN CLAN, THAT SWORD INSTRUCTOR YAGYU IS...
AAAGH! IF ONLY THERE WERE MORE PROGRESSIVELY THINKING GENIUSES LIKE YOU! BUT THE WORLD IS FULL OF STUBBORN, NARROW-MINDED BLOCKHEADS!
HMPH! HE'S JUST DESPERATELY CLINGING TO HIS PROFESSION AND STATUS!
BUT, NO, IT'S NOT JUST HIM. THERE ARE STILL MANY BLOCKHEAD SAMURAI WHO THINK THAT "PROJECTILE WEAPONS ARE COWARDLY"...
WHEN I WAS STILL BUT A BOY ...
WHAT A DISGRACEFUL WAY TO TREAT MY UNCLE AFTER YEARS OF MERITORIOUS SERVICE!
IT'S BECAUSE OF PEOPLE LIKE THEM THAT FIREARM EXPERTS' STIPENDS ARE THIS LOW!

SCROLL: DISCIPLINE OF THE MIND
精鍛
FATHER AND I ...
WE WERE PIONEERS OF KUNITOMO BLACKSMITHING. GREAT LORDS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY TREATED US LIKE EQUALS.
OH HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED. THE SAMURAI HAVE THROWN US ASIDE...
WHILE USELESS SWORDSMEN, WHO'D DIE WITHIN SECONDS ON THE FRONTLINE, PROSPER...
EVEN IN MY OWN CLAN, YAGYU GETS A RICH STIPEND AND HAS A HAND IN THE WORKINGS OF THE STATE!
AND THEREFORE, WE HUMBLY BESIEGE YOU TO...
HE EVEN OPPOSES INCREASING THE NUMBER OF FIREARM BRIGADES!
OLD-FASHIONED FOOL...
ALLOWING HIM ...
TO DECIDE THE FATE OF THE LAND...

IS A TRAGIC DISASTER FOR THE COUNTRY.
SHHHFFP
ゴゴ
YOU'VE MADE TWO!
HAHA, WHEN IT COMES TO PROTO -TYPES WE'VE ALWAYS BUILT TWO.
WHY DON'T WE TAKE THESE AND TEACH THAT MAN A LESSON?
YOU MEAN KILL HIM?
NO, JUST MAKE HIM THOROUGHLY AWARE THAT SWORDSMEN ARE OUTDATED RELICS OF THE PAST.
KA-POW
ドカッ!
HERE COMES ANOTHER ONE!


BFSHH!
HEHE, NEXT UP IS A NEW TYPE OF BUCKSHOT BARREL!
THUT
GRIP
IT WAS BUILT TO NEVER MISS!
PLOP!
A RIVET

WAIT, HYOE!
I WILL BLOW OFF THAT ARCHAIC HEAD OF YOURS!
HOW ABOUT IT, YAGYU?!
HAVE YOU FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE TERRIFYING POWER OF MACHINERY?!
ゴゴ DUN DUN
IF YOU KNEEL DOWN AND SINCERELY APOLOGIZE TO US, WE WILL LET YOU LIVE!
BUT IF YOU DON'T DO IT BEFORE I COUNT TO FIVE, WE WILL SEND YOU TO THE OTHER WORLD!

TWO!
THREE!
BASTARD!
KA-POW!

LISTEN CAREFULLY, TOSHIKANE.
TMP TMP TMP
ダダダダ
DASH
KEEP DASHING TO THE SIDE AT ALTERNATING SPEEDS – THAT IS THE GUN'S WEAKNESS.
GUNS NEED TO BE AIMED TO BE USEFUL AND THEY ALWAYS SHOOT IN A STRAIGHT LINE.
FWSHHHH
KA-POW!

SHWPP
IMPUDENT FOOL!
I CAN SEE THAT YOU'RE TRYING TO GET CLOSER TO ME BY RUNNING DIAGONALLY!
ダダダーッ
TMP TMP TMP
KA-POW!
ドガッ

FWSHHH
YOU HAVE ONE BULLET LEFT.
HOP
IF YOU MISS, YOUR MACHINE WILL BECOME NOTHING BUT A USELESS METAL ROD.
HEHE.
YOU'D THINK SO ...

I SHOULD THANK YOU FOR GETTING SO CLOSE TO ME. THERE IS NO CHANCE THAT I WILL MISS NOW.
I'M ALSO GRATEFUL FOR LETTING ME GET SO CLOSE. FROM HERE I CAN USE THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE MIND READING TECHNIQUE TO LOOK INSIDE YOUR HEART AND ATTACK JUST BEFORE YOU REACH FOR THE TRIGGER.
IT ALL COMES DOWN TO WHETHER YOU SHOOT TO THE LEFT OR RIGHT.
THE ULTIMATE GAMBLE.
WELL THEN ...
BEFORE YOU MOVE YOUR FINGER, SHOULD I DODGE TO THE RIGHT?
OR TO THE LEFT?
OH, YAGYU. WHAT IF DESPITE YOUR MIND READING I AIM FOR THE SIDE YOU DODGE TO AND SHOOT YOU?

RIGHT OR LEFT. LIFE OR DEATH. YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE.
THAT'S HOW IT ALWAYS IS IN A REAL SWORD FIGHT.
"THE SWORDS -MAN'S DESTINY."
FWSHHH
SIMPLY LEANS BACK TO THE LEFT.
BAM!

ズテ *CHARGE*
SLICE

FREEZE!
THWAD!
HUMAN LIFE IS A WEIGHTY THING ...
IT SHOULD NOT YIELD TO A MACHINE USED FROM A DISTANCE.
DRAW YOUR SWORD!
UUUH!
TREMBLE

CHARGE!!!
YAAAAAAA!

WOBBLE
WOBBLE
THUD!
Uuuh
I WANT MY OPPONENT AND I TO USE OUR OWN HANDS AND SKILLS AND HAVE A BATTLE OF WILLS.
IF I MUST FIGHT ...
IF I SWING MY SWORD NOW, I WILL BE BATHED IN A SPURT OF YOUR HOT BLOOD. THE WEIGHT OF TAKING YOUR LIFE WILL BE ON MY HANDS!

NOW IS THE TIME TO FOLLOW LORD TAIKO'S EXAMPLE!
WAR!
FIREARMS SHOW THEIR TRUE POWER IN COMBAT BETWEEN ENTIRE ARMIES!
DON'T MISUNDER-STAND, SWORDS-MAN!
EEGHEEHEE
ギヒヒ
THEN, THE FAMED HYOE KUNITOMO WILL BE ABLE TO COME UP WITH MORE IDEAS, EVEN GREATER THAN THE "INVINCIBLE"!

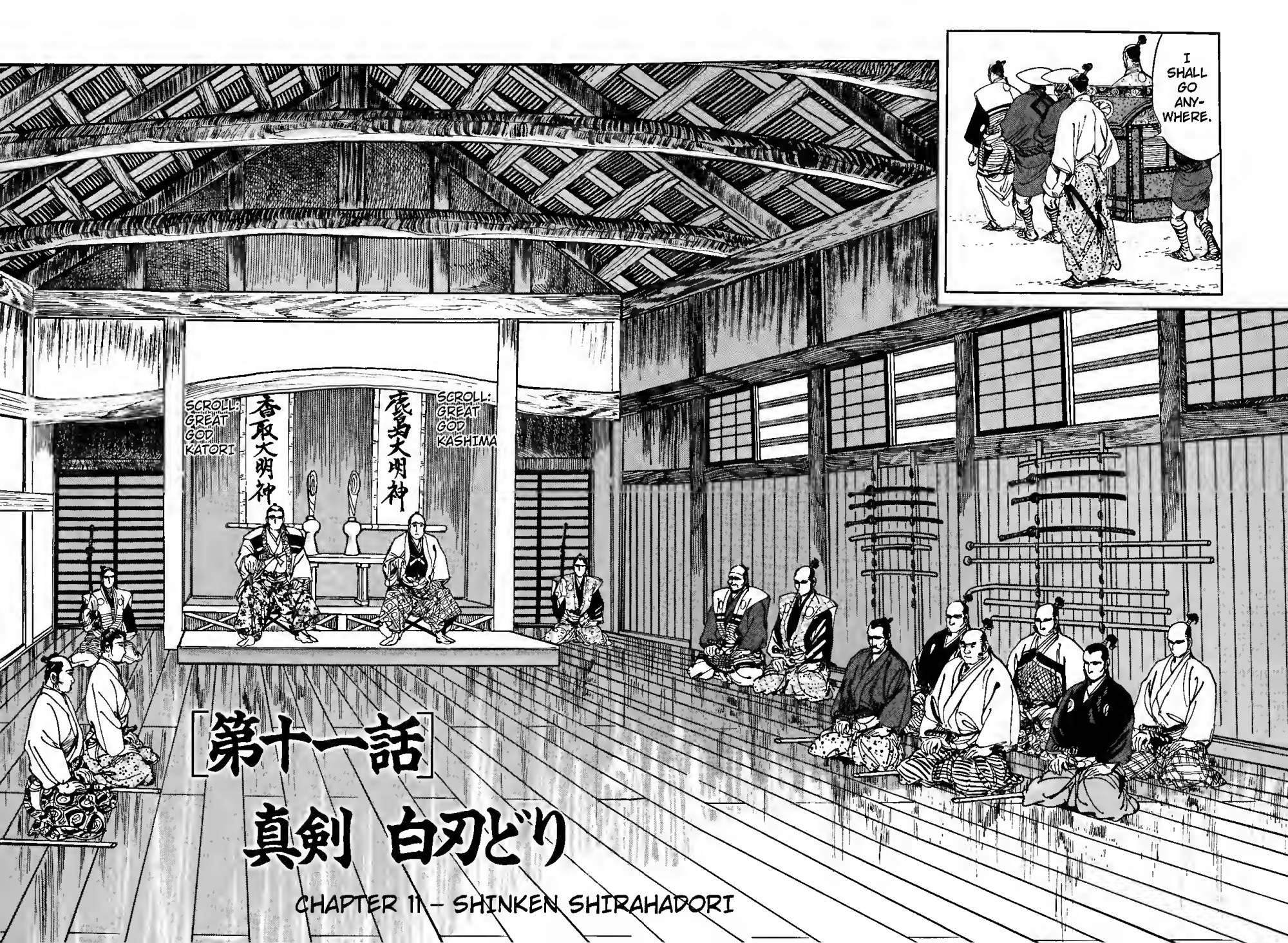
EEG-HEE-HEE
I BELIEVE THAT A WARRIOR'S TRUE PATH IS TO STOP WAR.
THE JAPANESE CHARACTER FOR "WARRIOR" IS COMPOSED OF PARTS MEANING "STOP" AND "WEAPON."

●「第十話」完●

CHAPTER 10 - FIN

1645, THE OWARI CLAN'S SPARE RESI-DENCE.
TOSHI-KANE.
THE OTHER DAY I HAD A TALK WITH MAJOR GENERAL MATSUDAIRA FROM THE MAEBASHI CLAN.
HE WANTS TO INVITE YOU TO THE OPENING OF HIS NEW DOJO.
WILL YOU JOIN ME THERE?
IF THE YOUNG LORD SO COMMANDS ...

* LATER KNOWN AS RENYASAI.

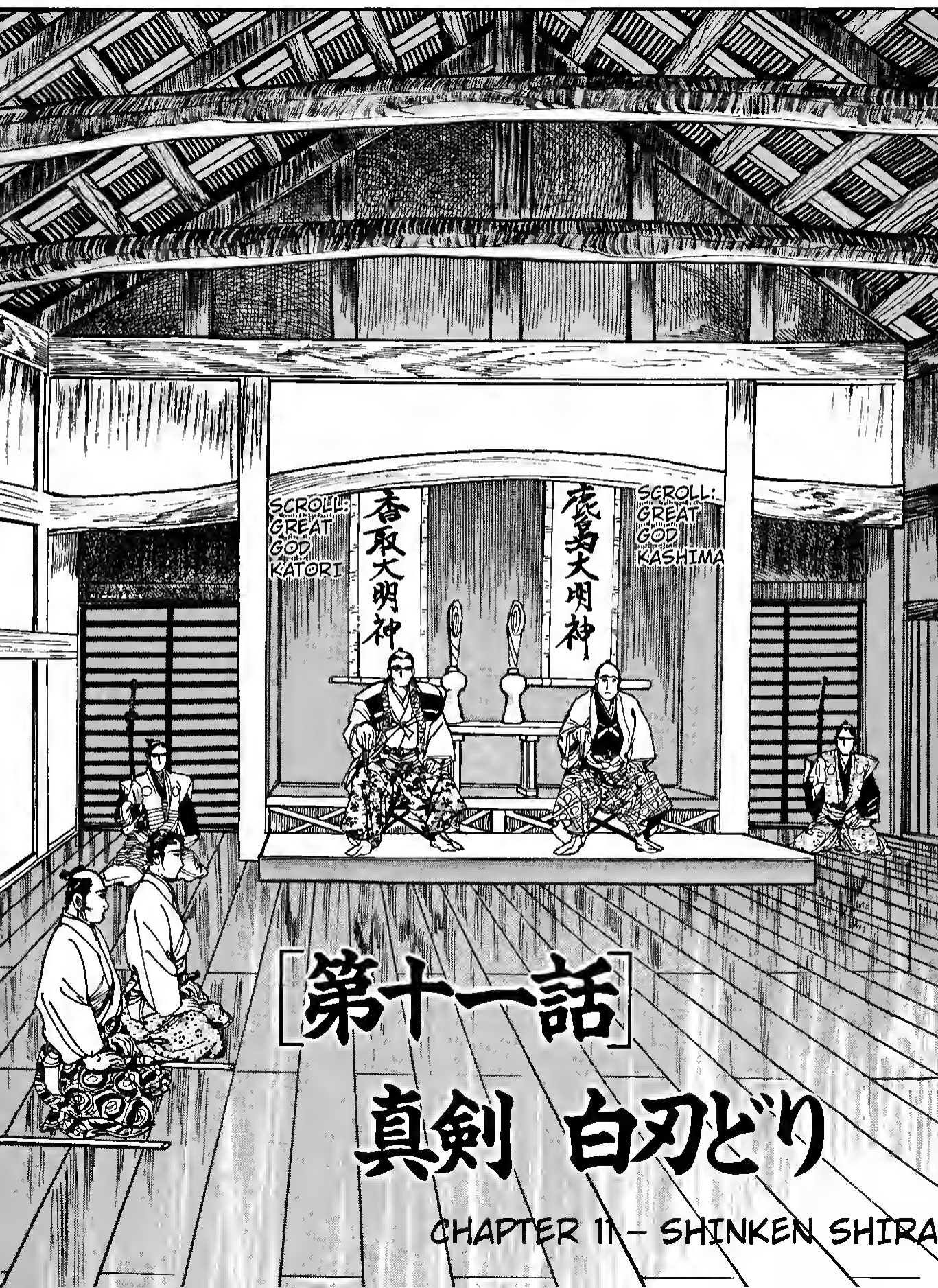


[第十一話]

真剣 白刃どり

CHAPTER 11 – SHINKEN SHIRAHADORI

I SHALL GO ANY-WHERE.
HADORI

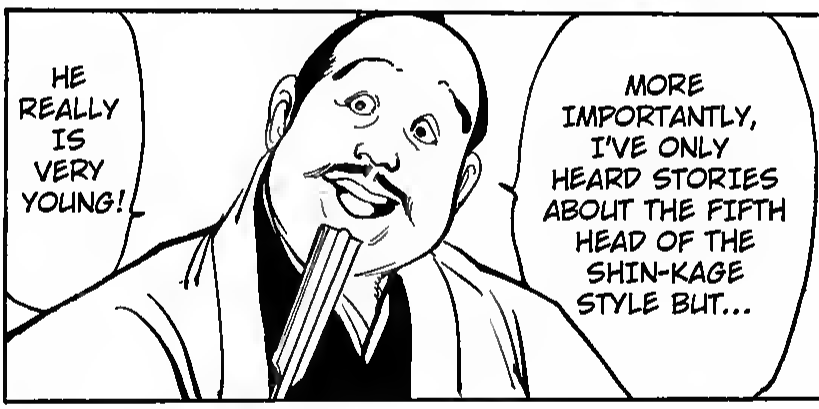


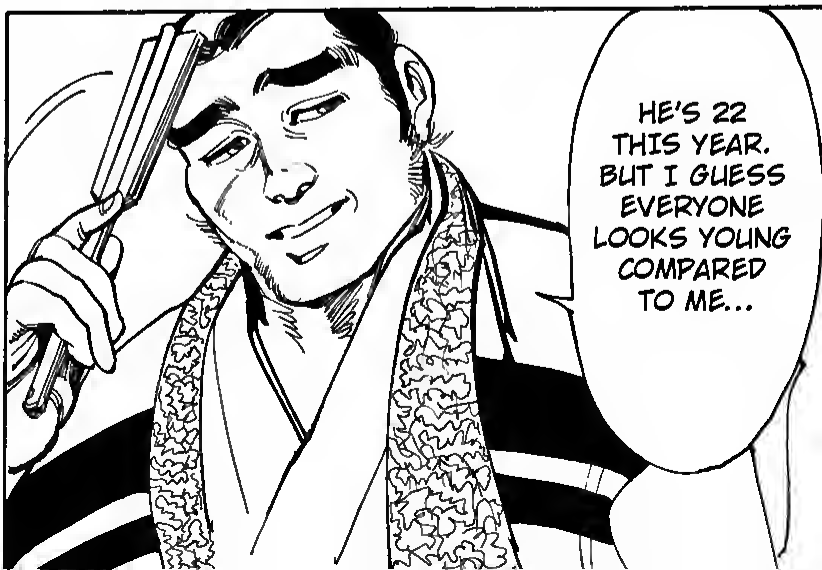
第十一話

真剣 白刃どり

CHAPTER 11 – SHINKEN SHIRA

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, MY DEAR LORD SHONAGON?* WHY, I'M JEALOUS OF YOUR MANLY, SAMURAI LOOKS. IT'S AS IF YOU'VE STEPPED DOWN FROM A PAINTING OF SOME GREAT WARRIOR!





* SHONAGON: A COUNSELOR OF THE THIRD RANK.

BY THE WAY, THESE ARE MY THREE SWORD INSTRUC-TORS.
FIRST, WE HAVE HOGAN OKUYAMA, OF THE TOGUN STYLE.
NEXT, MASAEMON ICHIMOTO, OF THE MUNEN STYLE.
FINALLY, THERE IS KYOGEN NAKAZAWA, OF THE SHINKO STYLE.
THE ONE WHO HOPED THE MOST THAT SIR YAGYU WOULD ACCEPT OUR INVITATION ...
WAS ACTUALLY NAKAZAWA.
THE DOMAIN OF THE MATSUDAIRA FAMILY, MAEBASHI, IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF MASTER NOBUTSUNA KAMIIZUMI.
IT IS A GREAT HONOR TO WELCOME THE FIFTH HEAD OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE TO THIS DOJO.

* A SPARRING PARTNER IN PRACTICING KATA, WHO LEARNS BY RECEIVING ATTACKS OF THE MORE EXPERIENCED PARTY.

"LEVELING OF THE MOUNTAIN."
NEXT ...
...
STEP
THAT WAS "THE FLOATING BOAT."
HIS TOGUN STYLE IS ALREADY A SHELL OF ITS FORMER SELF.
YOU CAN COMPLETELY SEE THE "ORIGIN" OF THE TIP OF HIS SWORD RIGHT BEFORE HE ATTACKS...
SIR OKUYAMA IS A NOBLE MAN BUT HIS SWORD SKILLS ARE MEDIOCRE.
HA!
WOH!
AAAAAAGH!
NEXT! MASAEMON ICHIMOTO!

HMPH, HE IS MUCH BETTER THAN OKUYAMA.
THE TIP OF HIS SWORD MOVES IN UNISON WITH HIS FOOTWORK.
HOW-EVER ...
HIS ATTACKS ARE WEAK. IT'S BECAUSE HE DOESN'T KEEP HIS ARMS CLOSE TO HIS BODY.
I'VE NEVER HAD A PUBLIC MATCH WITH A FELLOW SWORD INSTRUCTOR BUT...
10 TIMES OUT OF 10, VICTORY WILL BE MINE!
EVERYONE HAS PERFORMED ADMIRABLY THUS FAR.
THEN, NEXT ...
LET'S GIVE MY SWORD INSTRUCTOR, TOSHIKANE, A CHANCE.

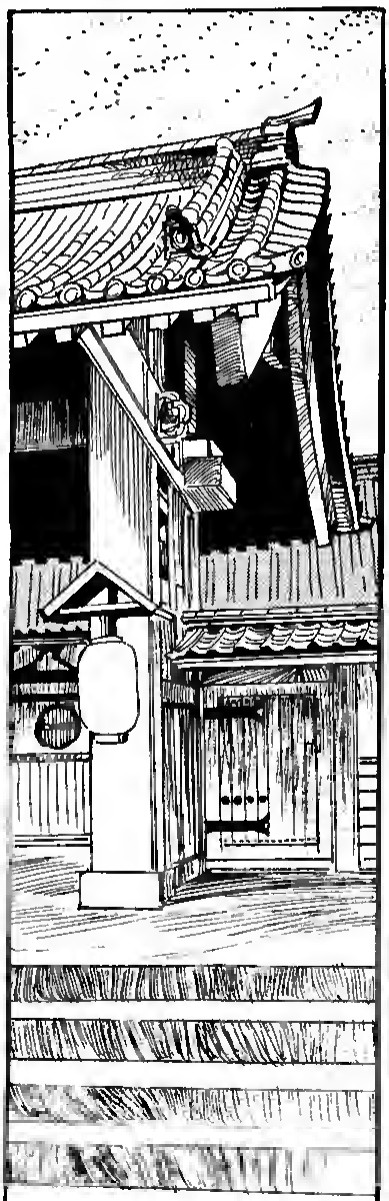
TO ANYONE BESIDES HIS SUCCESSOR BUT ...
NORMALLY A SWORDSMAN WILL NEVER DEMONSTRATE THE SECRET TECHNIQUES OF HIS STYLE ...
THE SHIDACHI WILL BE...
THE DISCIPLE JUDAYU YABE.
LET'S SEE JUST HOW MUCH WILL HE EXPOSE HIMSELF...
KLAK
KLAK
WOH!

NEXT IS THE "FALLING STRIKE FOLLOWED BY SINGLE HITS."
GWOOH!
...
THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT ABLE TO COMPREHEND THE GREATNESS OF THAT TECHNIQUE.
THOSE AT THE FOOT OF THE MOUNTAIN CANNOT SEE THE TOP...
GWOOH!

TO THINK THAT THE OWARI YAGYU GREENHORN HAS BECOME THIS SKILLED ...

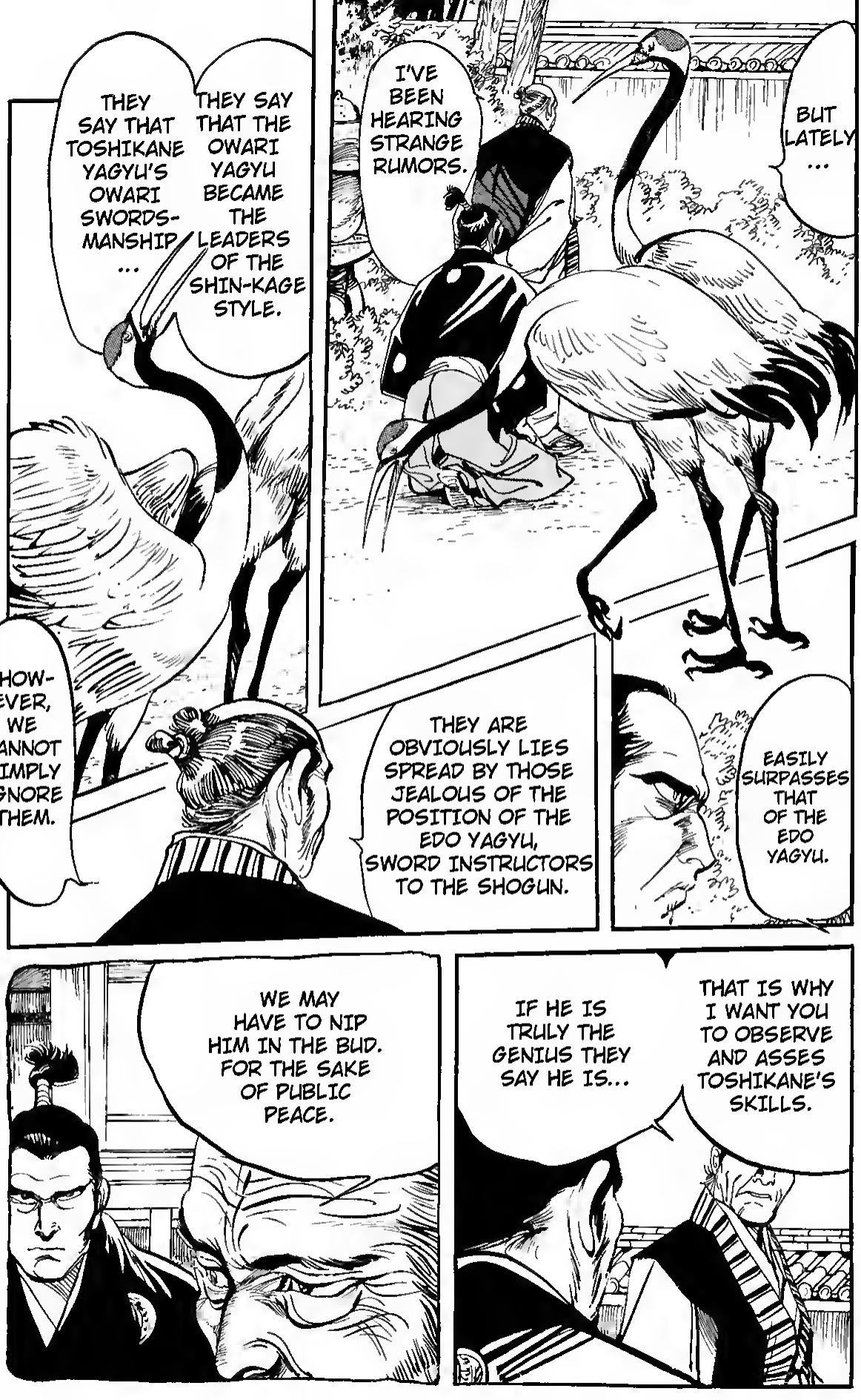
NEXT IS THE "LOW GUARD BLOCK FOLLOWED BY A STRIKE."
WHAT RUTH-LESS SWORD-PLAY!

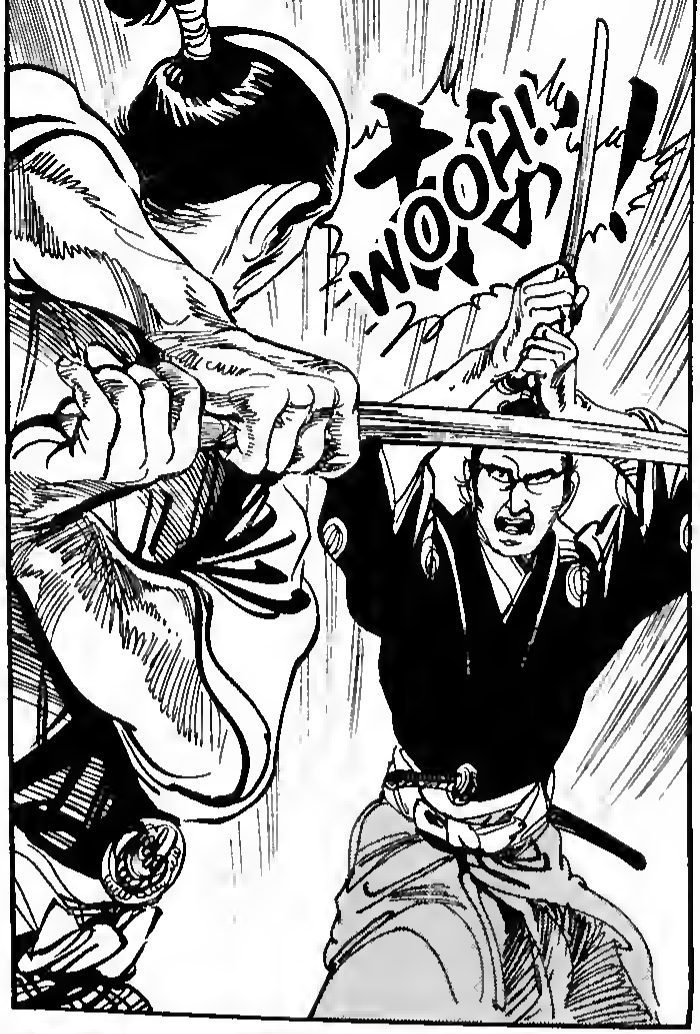
TAJI-MA-NO-KAMI MUNE-NORI YAGYU.

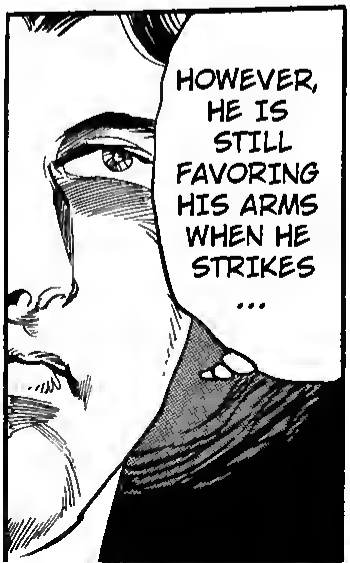


I'M HAPPY I COULD BE OF ANY SERVICE.
I'M THANKFUL FOR ALL THE INTERNAL REPORTS YOU'VE BEEN SENDING ALL THIS TIME.
HOW MANY YEARS HAS IT BEEN SINCE I RECOMMENDED YOU FOR THE POSITION OF SWORD INSTRUCTOR IN MAEBASHI?
IT HAS BEEN ABOUT SEVEN YEARS.
I THINK THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE RESULT OF YOUR WORK, GENERAL INSPECTOR TAJIMA-NO-KAMI.
WHOSE HARD WORK DO YOU THINK HELPED MAKE THAT HAPPEN?
BY THE WAY ... *COUGH*
RIGHT NOW, THE THIRD TOKUGAWA IS BRINGING IN ALL THE LORDS UNDER HIS CONTROL, BUILDING A STEADY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT ...
YOU'RE WRONG, NAKAZAWA!
NO, YOU'RE WRONG.

IT WAS THE HARD WORK OF YAGYU NINJAS!
ALWAYS STANDING BEHIND LORD IEYASU.
THE IGA HAVE BEEN UNITED AS ONE FAMILY SINCE THE TENSHO* ERA...
* TENSHO ERA: 1573 – 1592
I WISH FOR EVERY IGA MEMBER TO HEAR THEM.
MAY THE HEAVENS WITNESS THE TRUTH IN YOUR WORDS, IGA COMMANDER, LORD TAJIMA-NO-KAMI!
THE THREE OF US COMING TOGETHER IS WHAT MAINTAINS PEACE AND ORDER IN THE COUNTRY.
THE YAGYU EXIST BECAUSE OF THEIR NINJAS. THE TOKUGAWA EXIST BECAUSE OF THE EDO YAGYU.

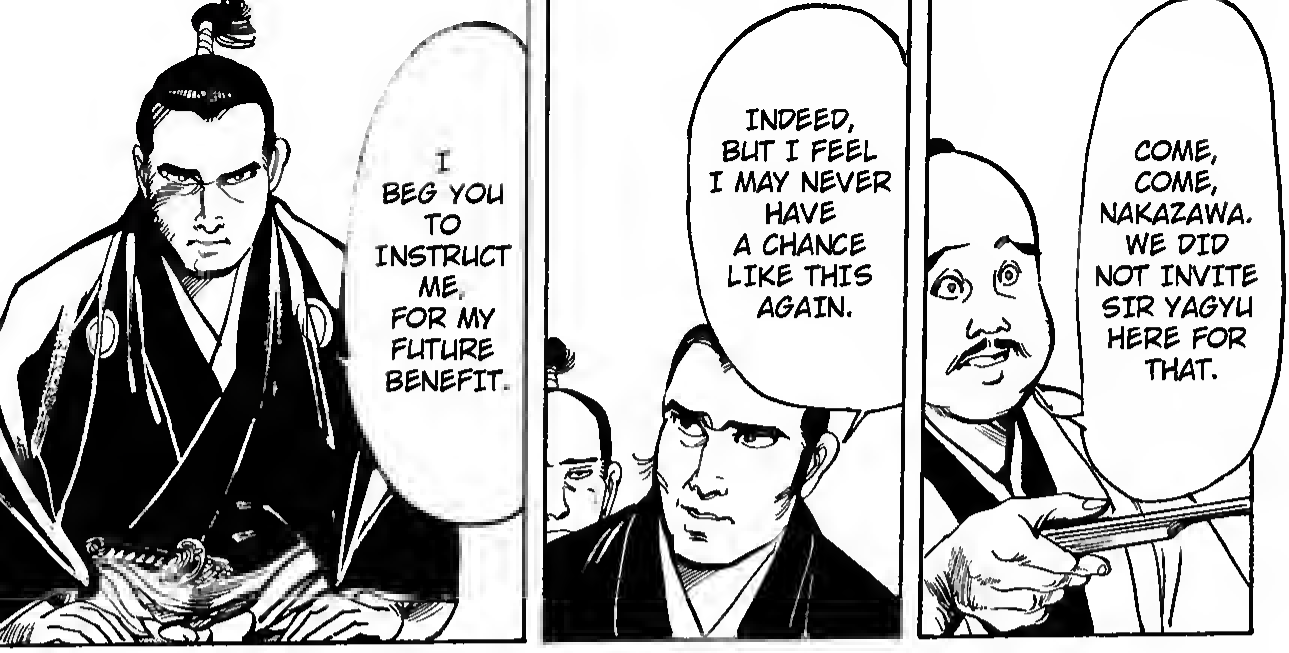

BUT LATELY ...
I'VE BEEN HEARING STRANGE RUMORS.
THEY SAY THAT THE OWARI YAGYU BECAME THE LEADERS OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE.
THEY SAY THAT TOSHIKANE YAGYU'S OWARI SWORDS-MANSHIP ...
EASILY SURPASSES THAT OF THE EDO YAGYU.
THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY LIES SPREAD BY THOSE JEALOUS OF THE POSITION OF THE EDO YAGYU, SWORD INSTRUCTORS TO THE SHOGUN.
HOW-EVER, WE CANNOT SIMPLY IGNORE THEM.
THAT IS WHY I WANT YOU TO OBSERVE AND ASSES TOSHIKANE'S SKILLS.
IF HE IS TRULY THE GENIUS THEY SAY HE IS...
WE MAY HAVE TO NIP HIM IN THE BUD. FOR THE SAKE OF PUBLIC PEACE.

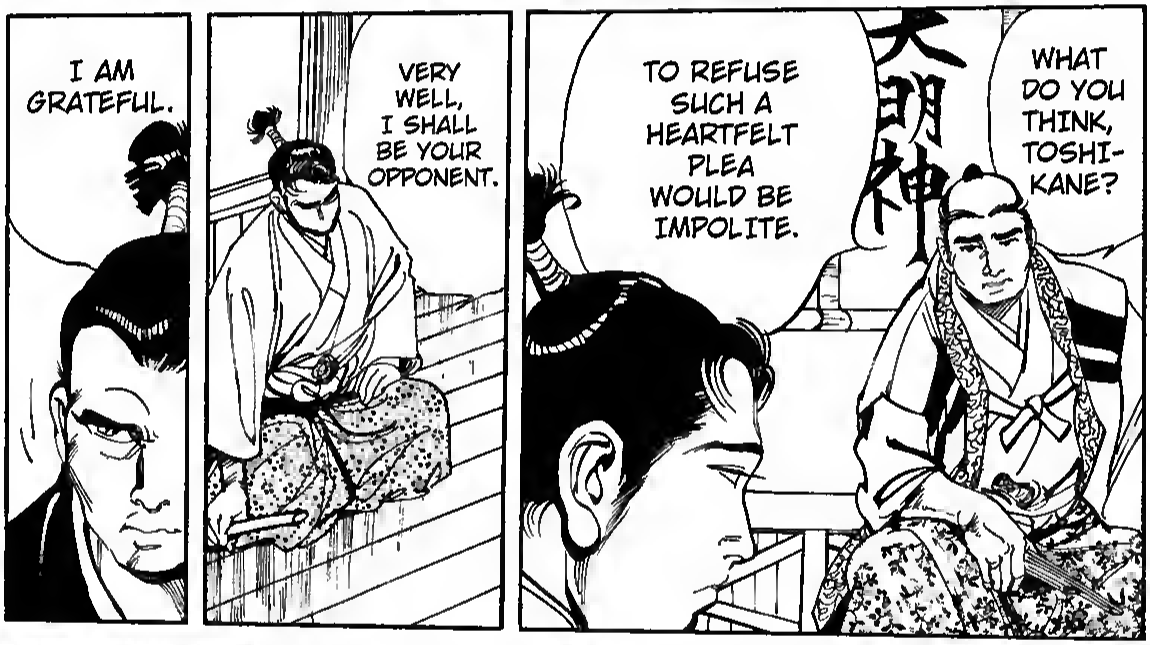




SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, FAMED, SKILLFUL SWORDSMEN DID NOT USE THEIR ARMS TO SWING THEIR SWORDS BUT RATHER THEIR PECTORAL MUSCLES. BECAUSE THE STRIKES CAME FROM THE CHEST, THEY WERE FASTER AND EASIER TO CONTROL. THEY ALSO DID NOT LEAVE ANY OPENINGS BETWEEN THE ARMS AND THE BODY.

武
大明
WELL DONE! EVERYONE WAS TRULY SUPERB!
I'M IN AWE OF HOW MANY TECHNIQUES THERE ARE IN THE WORLD.
WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT THE SHINKO STYLE...
SIR YAGYU?
THAT IS WHY, SIR YAGYU...
I WOULD TROUBLE YOU FOR A ONE ON ONE INSTRUCTIONAL MATCH.
NO, NO, SIR YAGYU'S TECHNIQUES ARE SOME OF THE BEST I'VE EVER SEEN.


COME, COME, NAKAZAWA. WE DID NOT INVITE SIR YAGYU HERE FOR THAT.
INDEED, BUT I FEEL I MAY NEVER HAVE A CHANCE LIKE THIS AGAIN.
I BEG YOU TO INSTRUCT ME, FOR MY FUTURE BENEFIT.


WHAT DO YOU THINK, TOSHI-KANE?
TO REFUSE SUCH A HEARTFELT PLEA WOULD BE IMPOLITE.
VERY WELL, I SHALL BE YOUR OPPONENT.
I AM GRATEFUL.

STEP

IN A MATCH WITH WOODEN SWORDS BETWEEN SAMURAI, IT'S UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU STOP RIGHT BEFORE A STRIKE OR, IF YOU DO MAKE A HIT, YOU DON'T PUT ANY STRENGTH BEHIND IT, SO AS TO NOT HURT YOUR OPPONENT.
I SENSE A THIRST FOR BLOOD FROM NAKAZAWA.
UHM!
!
HE'S SERIOUS!
HE PLANS TO BEAT TOSHIKANE TO DEATH!
THWUD
SHHWSHH
FFFWSHH
THAT'S ENOUGH!

FOOL!
DON'T YOU REALIZE SIR YAGYU WENT EASY ON YOU JUST NOW?!
NO, MY LORD. SUCH A TRIFLE THING CANNOT MEAN MY DEFEAT!
TWWWP
THAT'S ENOUGH, NAKAZAWA!
EVEN KAMIIZUMI WAS ONLY ABLE TO PERFORM THE SHIRAHADORI BECAUSE OF THE VAST SKILL GAP BETWEEN HIM AND HIS OPPONENTS!
I WONDER IF YOU CAN BLOCK MY ATTACK WITH THAT. HOW ABOUT IT?!
SIR YAGYU. SINCE THE TIMES OF LORD KAMIIZUMI, EVERYONE IN THE LAND HAS BEEN TALKING ABOUT THE SHIN-KAGE SHINKEN SHIRAHADORI,* BUT IT'S ALWAYS BEEN KEPT A SECRET.

* THE ART OF TAKING YOUR OPPONENT'S SWORD AWAY FROM HIM WITH YOUR BARE HANDS.

APOLOGIES, LORD OWARI SHONAGON!
TO ASK HIM TO FIGHT YOU WITHOUT HIS SWORD?!
DO YOU PERHAPS HOLD SOME GRUDGE AGAINST TOSHIKANE ...
A NAMELESS SMALL FRY LIKE ME SURELY HAS NO CHANCE OF DEFEATING HIM.
THE GREAT SIR YAGYU IS A RENOWNED SWORDSMAN, THE FIFTH HEAD OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE.
I AGREE TO SHOW YOU MY SHIRAHADORI.
UHM!
GENIUS OWARI SWORDSMAN WOULD SAY.
JUST WHAT A...
SIR NAKAZAWA.

STEP
STEP!
!
THWAP!
ドン
THWUD!

HUMH!
SSST!
HOW WAS THAT?
NO ONE WAS ABLE TO CLEARLY SEE WHAT EXACTLY HAD HAPPENED.
WHEN THE STRIKE CAME, RENYA MOVED ASIDE ...
THEN BENT HIS KNEE, BRACING HIMSELF ...
AND JUST WHEN NAKAZAWA FELL FRONTWARD, RENYA WRESTLED HIS SWORD FROM HIM.

A DESPERATE UPWARDS SWING, AIMING FOR THE CROTCH.
ONCE MORE!
UUGH!
ドカッ
THUD
UUGH!
ONCE MORE!
SHHHWP

(1)
(2)
(3)
THUD!
WHEN NAKAZAWA STRAIGHTENS HIMSELF, RENYA SWEEPS THE LEG AND TWISTS HIS SWORDS AWAY FROM HIM.
THE 1, 2, 3 ARE ACTUALLY THE LENGTH OF A SINGLE BEAT.

CLAP
IT'S BEEN SAID THAT LORD KAMIIZUMI'S FIRST SHIRAHADORI ...
WAS HIM CATCHING A SWORD BETWEEN HIS HANDS.
HOWEVER, ORIGINALLY THE SHIRAHADORI WAS ONLY PERFORMED WITH REAL SWORDS! MOREOVER...
I SEE. AS EXPECTED OF SIR YAGYU.
HMPH! WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO ...
FROM THE VERY BEGINNING YOU WERE SIMPLY PLANNING TO TEST OUT MY SKILLS.
IN DAYS PAST, SAMURAI TOOK UP ARMS AND FOUGHT ONLY TO PROTECT THEIR LIVES AND THEIR HONOR.
A HALFHEARTED PLAY-FIGHT IS NOT THE PROVINCE OF A SAMURAI.
SIR NAKAZAWA.

STARTING TODAY ...
WELL?! I HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD, DIDN'T I, TOSHIKANE YAGYU?!
WHY DON'T YOU JUST ADMIT THAT YOUR DUSTY-OLD SHIN-KAGE STYLE IS BUT A SHELL OF ITS FORMER SELF? YOU SIMPLY AREN'T ABLE TO DO WHAT LORD NOBUTSUNA DID!
HA HA HA
YOU NO LONGER HAVE THE RIGHT TO USE THE NAME OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE!
YOU'VE GONE MAD, NAKAZAWA!
EVERYONE! RESTRAIN HIM!
PLEASE WAIT, LORD MAJOR GENERAL!
A FIGHT WITH REAL SWORDS WOULD SURELY RESULT IN A DEATH.
IF YOU WILL FORGIVE ME FOR SPILLING BLOOD IN YOUR NEW DOJO, THEN I WILL GLADLY AGREE TO CATCH A SWORD BETWEEN MY HANDS.

YOU WILL PAY FOR IT WITH YOUR LIFE!
DON'T BE FOOLISH, TOSHIKANE! IF YOU MAKE EVEN A TINY MISTAKE..
EVEN THOUGH BLOOD IS AN UNAVOIDABLE PART OF A DOJO ...
MURMUR
BEGIN WHENEVER YOU WANT, NAKAZAWA!
I AM THE FIFTH HEAD OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE.
MY LORD, I'M VERY GRATEFUL FOR YOUR CONCERN BUT...

MY MIND ...
MY MIND IS CLEAR ...
IS CLEAR ...
KLAP
USING THE MOMENTUM FROM HIS MOVEMENT, AND NOT STRENGTH, RENYA OVER-POWERS NAKAZAWA.

STAB
THE COUNTRY ...
UUGH!
IS IN CRISIS!

SLASH

FOR-GIVE ME.
IT'S MY FAULT FOR GETTING YOU INVOLVED WITH THAT DAMNED FOOL.
NO, NO.
THE COUNTRY IS IN CRISIS!
THWUD

I KNEW THE RISKS WHEN I BECAME THE HEAD OF MY FAMILY.
MORE IMPORTANTLY, ARE YOU SURE THAT MAN DIDN'T HOLD SOME GRUDGE AGAINST YOU?
WE MET FOR THE FIRST TIME TODAY. I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING ...
AND WHAT DID HE MEAN BY "THE COUNTRY IS IN CRISIS"...?
...
EVER SINCE JUBEI DIS-APPEARED ...
THE HONOR OF TRAINING THE SHOGUN... *COUGH* HAS GONE TO YOU, MUNEFUYU. BUT...

YOU DON'T HAVE HALF OF JUBEI'S TALENT.
THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT SOMEONE ...
WON'T TAKE YOUR POSITION WITH THE SHOGUN AWAY FROM YOU.
NOW MORE THAN EVER YOU MUST PUT YOUR LIFE ON THE LINE TO MASTER ...
THE ESSENCE OF THE YAGYU SHIN-KAGE STYLE!
COME!

THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE DOJO WAS LOCATED 200 METERS FROM THE OWARI RESIDENCE.
ONE EARLY MORNING, A DISCIPLE OF THE DOJO NOTICED A STRANGE SMELL COMING FROM THE GATE.
?
I-IT'S TERRIBLE!

CHAPTER 12: THE ART OF "FENCES WITHIN FENCES"

第十二話

兵法 八重垣

AH!
THEY'VE ALSO STOLEN THE SIGNBOARD!
THAT SIGNBOARD WAS CAREFULLY SELECTED BY GREAT MASTER HYOGONOSUKE ...
THE CALLIGRAPHY WAS DONE BY HIS LORDSHIP HIMSELF!

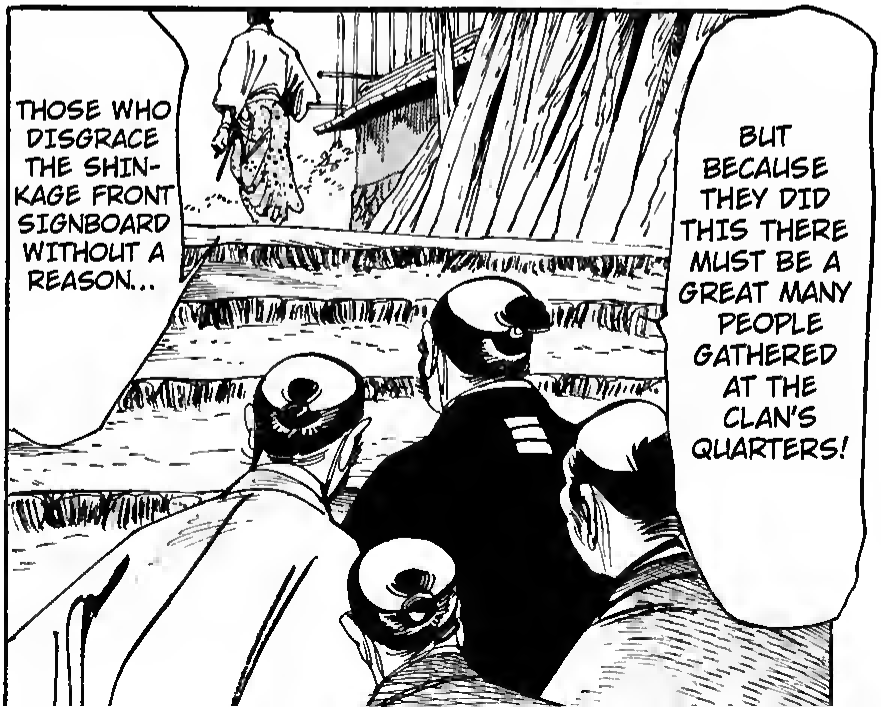
LETTER:
TO THE CRUEL TOSHIKANE YAGYU – REPENT FOR YOUR SINS. OMAN OTORI

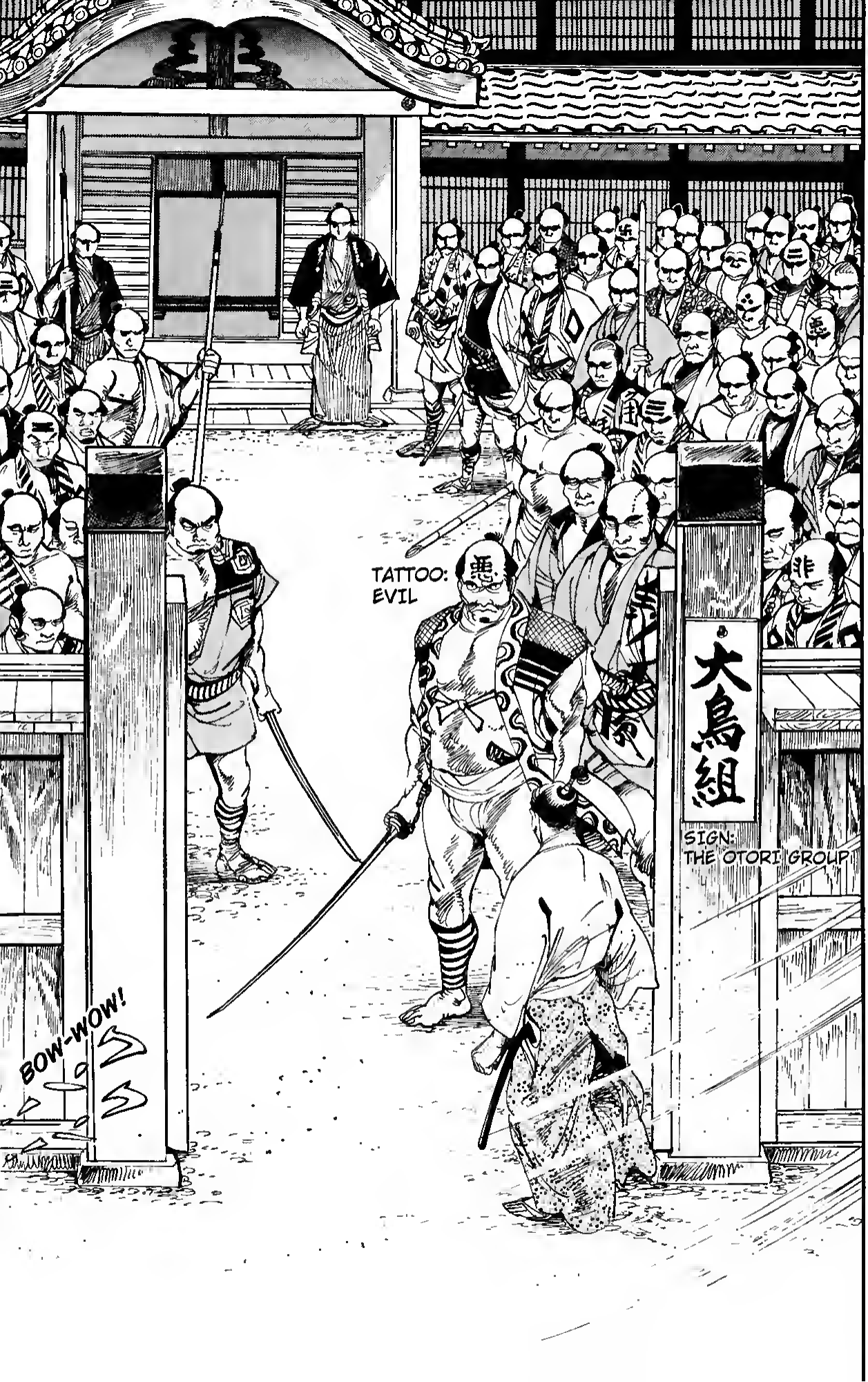
THE HEAD OF THE CLAN, OMAN, HAS OVER 500 MEN UNDER HER.
THE OTORI GROUP ARE THE LARGEST SERVANT GO-BETWEENS FOR WARRIOR HOUSES IN EDO.
OMAN OTORI ?

WHAT SHE DID WAS EQUAL TO CUTTING MY SOUL INTO PIECES.
WHO-EVER SHE IS...
EACH ONE OF THEM LOVES HER DEARLY AND KEEPS CALLING HER "MOTHER," "MOTHER."
MOST OF THEM STARTED OUT AS NOTORIOUS VAGRANTS WHO DRIFTED INTO EDO. BUT THEY WERE THEN TAKEN IN BY OMAN AND, TOUCHED BY HER KINDNESS, STARTED WORKING AS TEMPORARY SERVANTS FOR PRESTIGIOUS WARRIOR HOUSEHOLDS.

*LATER KNOWN AS RENYASAI

THE KABUKI WERE FOOTMEN, SERVANTS AND LABORERS WHO PUT THEIR SKILLS AND LOYALTIES UP FOR SALE AND WERE HIRED AS TEMPORARY SERVANTS TO WARRIOR HOUSEHOLDS (EMPLOYING FULLTIME SERVANTS WAS MUCH COSTLIER.)


THOSE WHO DISGRACE THE SHIN-KAGE FRONT SIGNBOARD WITHOUT A REASON...
BUT BECAUSE THEY DID THIS THERE MUST BE A GREAT MANY PEOPLE GATHERED AT THE CLAN'S QUARTERS!

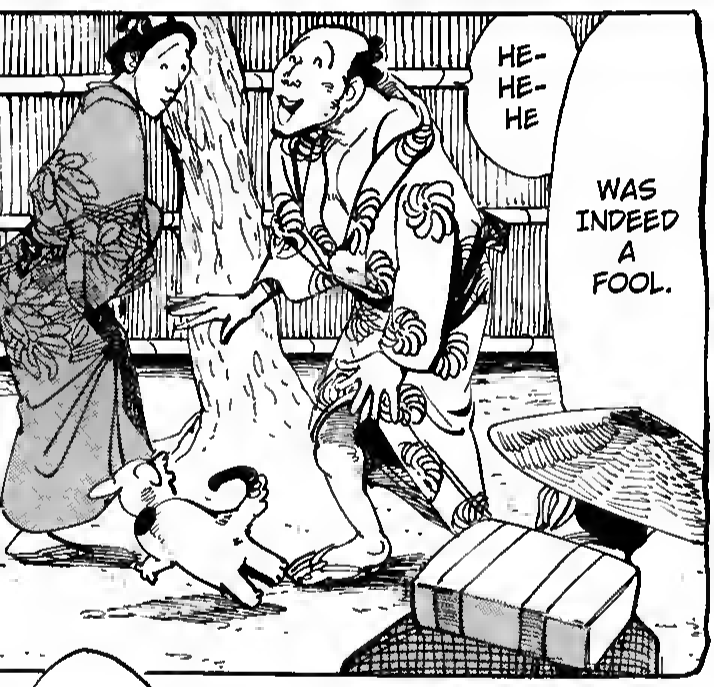

TATTOO:
EVIL
大鳥組
SIGN:
THE OTORI GROUP
BOW-WOW!

ARE YOU TOSHIKANE YAGYU?!
I AM! I CAME TO RETRIEVE THE SOUL OF MY DOJO!
IF YOU TRULY REPENT AND CONFESS YOUR SINS HERE ...
WE WILL RETURN THE SIGNBOARD TO YOU!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
バン!
SHHHHFW

MOTHER!
TOSS
IT STANDS TO REASON YOU DO NOT WANT TO PUBLICALLY CONFESS TO YOUR CRIMES AND YOUR IMPRUDENCE.
YOU ARE STILL YOUNG. YOU HAVE A FUTURE AHEAD OF YOU.
...

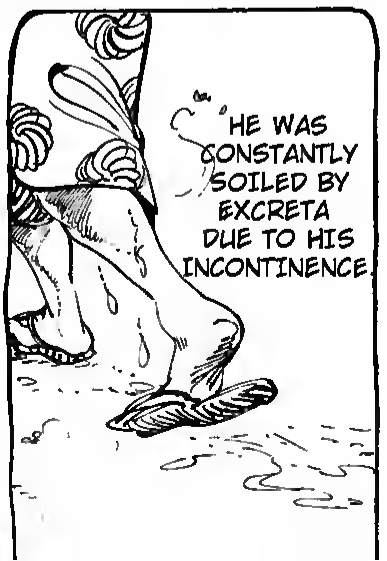
THWUP
TAKE THAT SWORD AND CUT OFF TWO FINGERS FROM YOUR LEFT HAND. YOUR SIGNBOARD WILL BE THEN PEACEFULLY RETURNED TO YOU ...
AND WE WILL FORGET THIS ENTIRE MATTER.
WHAT SHOULD I REPENT FOR?
THE BUTCHERING OF MY SON SEIKICHI!
DO NOT FEIGN IGNORANCE!

THINK OF US AS HUMANS!
DON'T EVEN...
YOU FUCKING SAMURAI ...
A CRIMINAL MARKED WITH A TATTOO.


HE-HE-HE
WAS INDEED A FOOL.

MR. YAGYU, IT'S TRUE THAT SAMURAI HAVE THE RIGHT TO KILL COMMONERS FOR THEIR PERCEIVED AFFRONTS.
AND MY OLDER BRO-THER SEI-KICHI ...

COME ON, SEIKICHI.
LET ME BE!
AND WHENEVER HE SAW SOMEONE HE IMMEDIATELY BECAME FRIENDLY WITH THEM, HUGGING THEM AND TRYING TO LICK THEIR FACES LIKE A DOG.


HE WAS CONSTANTLY SOILED BY EXCRETA DUE TO HIS INCONTINENCE.

THEN YOU CAME ALONG AND...
BUT THAT WAS JUST HOW MY BROTHER SHOWED HIS LOVE FOR HUMANITY.
SLASH
SPURT

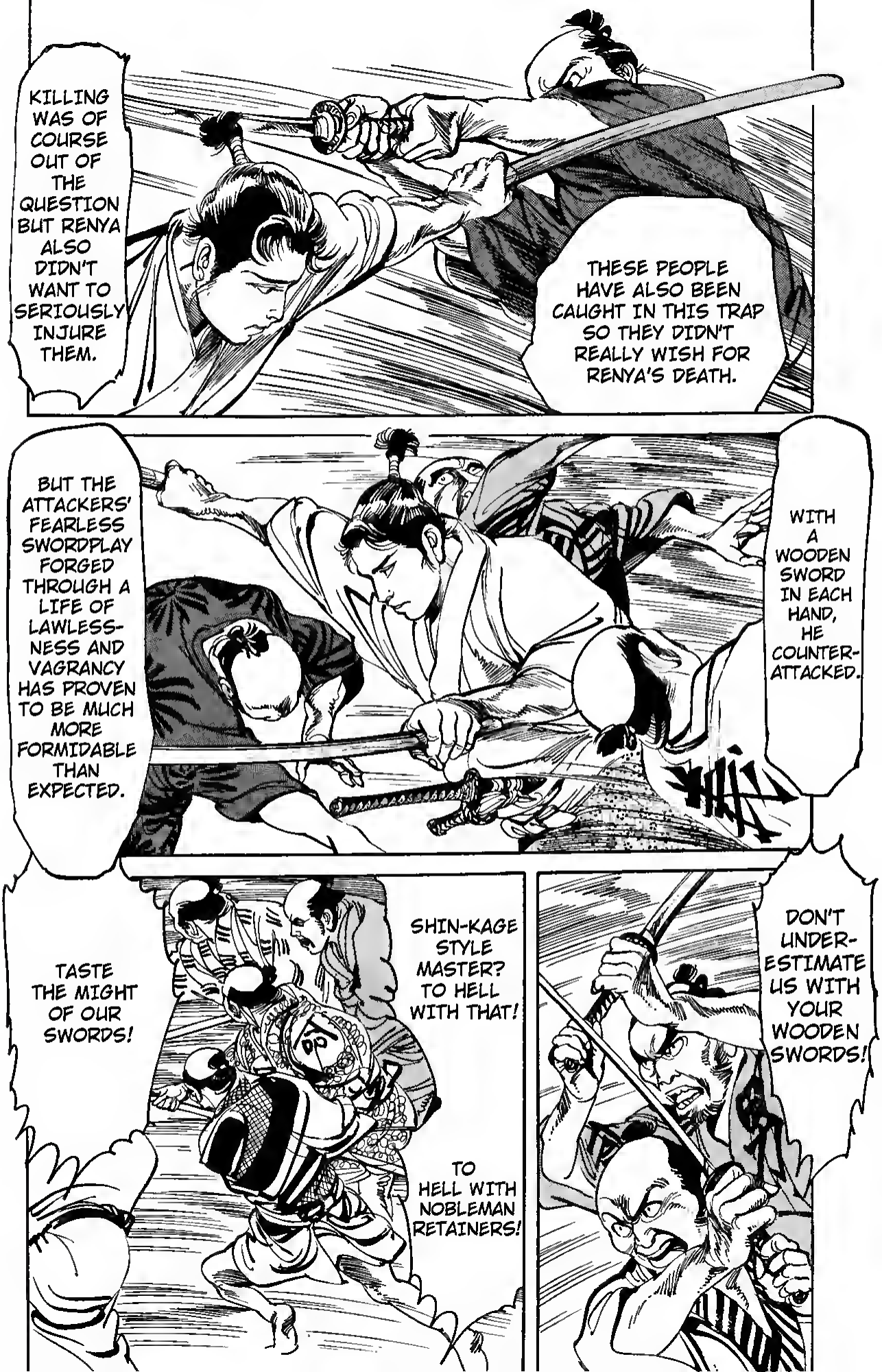
WHEN, WHERE AND HOW WAS YOUR BROTHER KILLED?
TO FEIGN IGNORANCE OF THAT IS BEYOND REPROACH!
THREE DAYS AGO, AT THE HOUR OF THE ROOSTER,* ON THE MEGURO ROAD IN KAKINOKIZAKA. YOU ATTACKED FROM YOUR LEFT, CUTTING HIM SLANTWISE FROM THE SHOULDER. THEN, CUTTING UPWARDS, YOU SLICED OFF HIS FACE.
ON MY WAY BACK FROM KAWASAKI I INDEED DID PASS THROUGH KAKINOKIZAKA AROUND THAT TIME, BUT I DO NOT REMEMBER KILLING ANYONE.
WE HAVE AN EYE-WITNESS!
MAKE SURE THAT IT WAS HIM, MADAM OKUME!
* SIX P.M.

I-IT WAS THAT SAMURAI! I'M CERTAIN OF IT!
TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT HIS FACE!
HIS KIMONO, HIS HAKAMA* AND HIS SHEATH ARE THE SAME!
* A FORMAL DIVIDED SKIRT WORN BY MEN.
THIS WAS NEXT TO HIS CORPSE.
WHEN I FOUND MY BROTHER ...
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT! *SHRIEK*!
IT WAS DUSKY THEN BUT ... THIS FACE ...

THE KILLER DROPPED HIS PILLBOX.
IT BELONGS TO YOU, DOESN'T IT?!
THAT PILLBOX WAS STOLEN FROM MY ROOM 10 DAYS AGO ...
IN THAT CASE ... EIZO.
YES!
EIZO HERE WORKED AT THE OWARI RESIDENCE FOR A MONTH AND KNOWS YOUR FACE WELL, DON'T YOU EIZO?
IMMEDIATELY AFTER SEIKICHI'S KILLING I'VE SEEN THIS SWORD INSTRUCTOR CROSSING THE MEGURO ROAD IN A HURRY.
YES!
I'VE SEEN IT WITH MY OWN EYES!
...
YOU SEE HOW MUCH EVIDENCE WE HAVE AGAINST YOU!

IT LOOKS TO ME LIKE SOMEONE IS TRYING TO ENTRAP ME. AND THEY'RE SUCCEEDING.
YAGYU... EVERYONE WHO MET MY SON FOR THE FIRST TIME PROBABLY THOUGHT OF HIM AS A STRANGE PERSON.
A SAMURAI MIGHT TAKE HIS BEHAVIOR AS AN INSULT AND KILL HIM.
BUT LEAVING SEIKICHI THERE AND WALKING AWAY WITHOUT EVEN REPORTING IT TO THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE MEANS HIS SOUL CANNOT REST.
I'VE LOST COUNT OF ...
HOW MANY OF OUR COMRADES WERE KILLED FOR THEIR "INSULTS" BY YOU FUCKING SAMURAI ...

MEAN AS MUCH TO YOU AS THE LIVES OF INSECTS!
THE LIVES OF US TOWNSPEOPLE ...
IT WILL BE A FITTING OFFERING FOR SEIKICHI IN THE AFTERLIFE!
BRING ME HIS HEAD!
FLING
THWUD!


KILLING WAS OF COURSE OUT OF THE QUESTION BUT RENYA ALSO DIDN'T WANT TO SERIOUSLY INJURE THEM.
THESE PEOPLE HAVE ALSO BEEN CAUGHT IN THIS TRAP SO THEY DIDN'T REALLY WISH FOR RENYA'S DEATH.
BUT THE ATTACKERS' FEARLESS SWORDPLAY FORGED THROUGH A LIFE OF LAWLESS-NESS AND VAGRANCY HAS PROVEN TO BE MUCH MORE FORMIDABLE THAN EXPECTED.
WITH A WOODEN SWORD IN EACH HAND, HE COUNTER-ATTACKED.
TASTE THE MIGHT OF OUR SWORDS!
SHIN-KAGE STYLE MASTER? TO HELL WITH THAT!
TO HELL WITH NOBLEMAN RETAINERS!
DON'T UNDER-ESTIMATE US WITH YOUR WOODEN SWORDS!

WHILE SURROUNDED BY MANY ENEMIES, A WARRIOR ONLY FACES EIGHT OF THEM – THE ONES IN FRONT AND BEHIND HIM, THE ONES TO THE LEFT AND RIGHT, AND THE ONES COMING AT HIM DIAGONALLY.
BUT OUT OF THOSE EIGHT ONLY FOUR ARE IN THE POSITION TO ATTACK.
FURTHER-MORE, IF ALL FOUR OF THEM ATTACK AT ONCE, THERE'S A CHANCE THEY WILL HIT EACH OTHER.
FWWWSH
THERE-FORE ...
SHHHWSH

THE NEXT IMPOR-TANT THING IS TO...
IF YOU CAN EXECUTE AN ATTACK THAT STRIKES TWO OPPONENTS AT ONCE, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DOMINATE DOZENS OF ENEMIES.
AND BREAK THROUGH THE ENEMY LINE AND RUN.
USE THE BODIES OF YOUR FALLEN OPPONENTS AS A MAKESHIFT SHIELD...
THAT IS THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE MARTIAL ART OF "FENCES WITHIN FENCES."

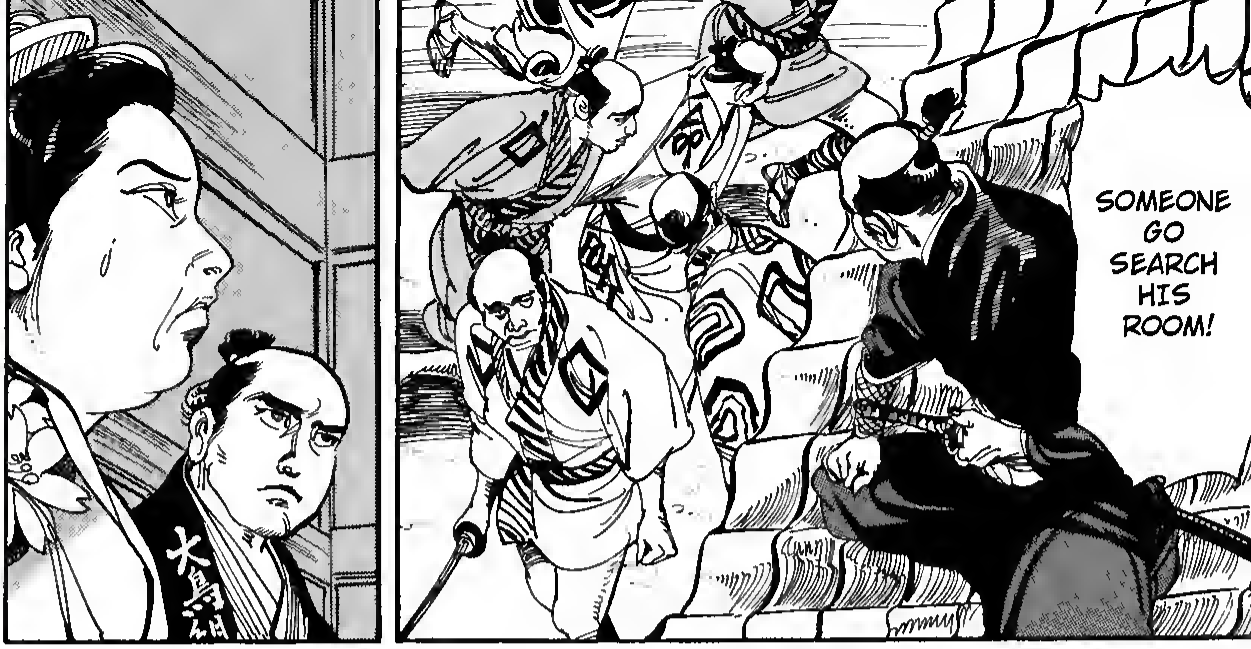
UNFORTU-
NATELY,
DEPENDING
ON WHERE
THEY'VE
BEEN HIT
BY THE
WOODEN
SWORD,
THE
ATTACKERS
KEPT
COMING.
DIE!
I WILL
FUCKING
KILL YOU!
THWUP!
RENYA
GAVE IT
HIS ALL
TO FEND
OFF THE
ENDLESS
SWARM OF
FEARLESS
FIGHTERS
...
AND
TRIED
TO GET
CLOSER
TO THAT
EIZO
PERSON
FROM
BEFORE.
FACED WITH
THE POWER
OF RENYA'S
APPROACHING
FURY,
EIZO FELT
FEAR
AND AWE.
BUT HE
TOOK
THAT
FEAR AND
TURNED IT
AROUND
INTO A
COUNTER-
ATTACK.
AYAAA!
THAT IS
WHEN
RENYA
FINALLY
DREW HIS
SWORD.
KLINK!

PUSH
URK!
YOU'VE ALL SEEN IT! THIS MAN IS A TRAINED SWORDSMAN! HE IS ALSO LEFT-HANDED!
OMAN !
YOUR SON WAS CUT DOWNWARD FROM THE LEFT SHOULDER, CORRECT?!
THAT'S HOW A LEFT-HANDED SWORDSMAN WOULD NORMALLY DO IT!
HE WOULD ONLY GO FOR THE RIGHT SHOULDER WITH A SINGLE-HANDED STRIKE!

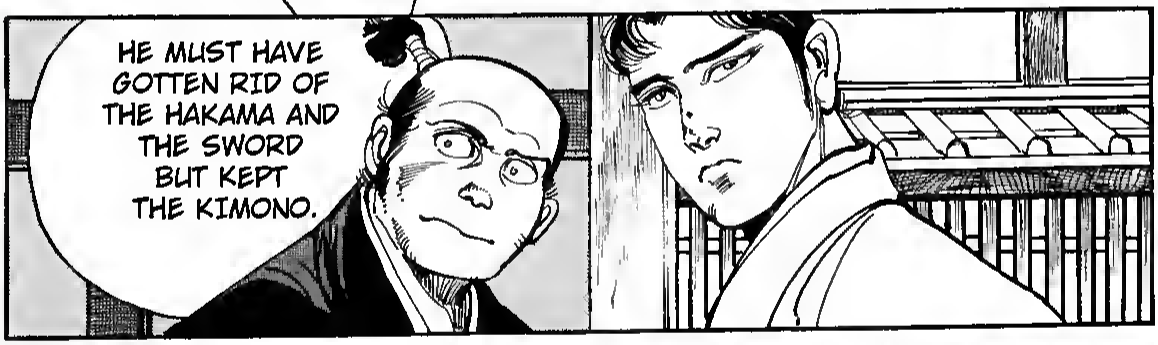
CONFESS NOW OR I WILL CUT OFF YOUR ARM!
YOU ARE THE ONE WHO KILLED SEIKICHI, AREN'T YOU?!
BUT SUCH AN ATTACK WOULD BARELY REACH THE LUNGS.
SHWUP!
THWUMP!
TMP

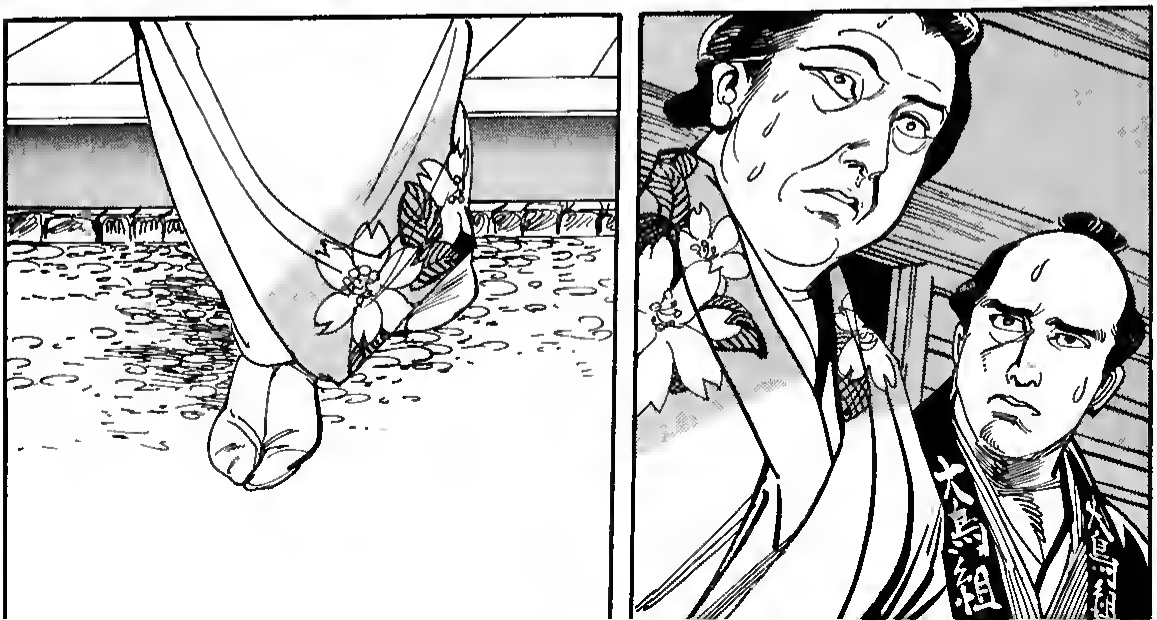
THUD
GEN-PACHI!
HMPH!
?!
MPHH!
WHO ORDERED YOU TO DO THAT?!
IT WAS YOU, WASN'T IT?!
THE ONE WHO STOLE MASTER TOSHIKANE'S PILLBOX MUST HAVE KNOWN HIS WAY AROUND THE OWARI RESIDENCE!
BASTARD! I WON'T LET YOU SUFFOCATE!
I WILL PULL THAT TONGUE RIGHT OUT!

TWWWWNG
YEAH!
YOU'VE ALL SEEN IT! HE PRETENDED TO BE A VAGRANT BUT IN REALITY...
HE WAS ACTUALLY AN IGA NINJA, YOUNG MASTER!
SPLAT!


SOMEONE GO SEARCH HIS ROOM!

FOUND IT! A KIMONO HIDDEN UNDER THE FLOOR!
THE SAME FAINT YELLOW COLOR!


HE MUST HAVE GOTTEN RID OF THE HAKAMA AND THE SWORD BUT KEPT THE KIMONO.

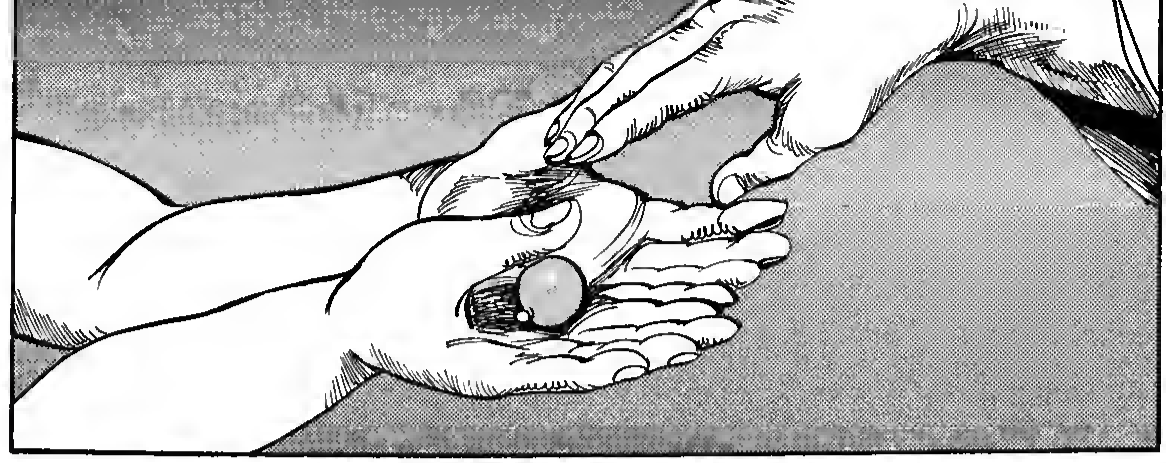


義
DO YOU THINK JUST SAYING THAT WILL BRING THIS MATTER TO AN END?!!
I'VE ACTED RASHLY.
FROM THE VERY BEGI-NNING ...
I PLANNED TO TAKE SOLE RESPON-SIBILITY FOR THIS.
RUSTLE
TATTOOS: CHIVALROUS SPIRIT
俠
仁

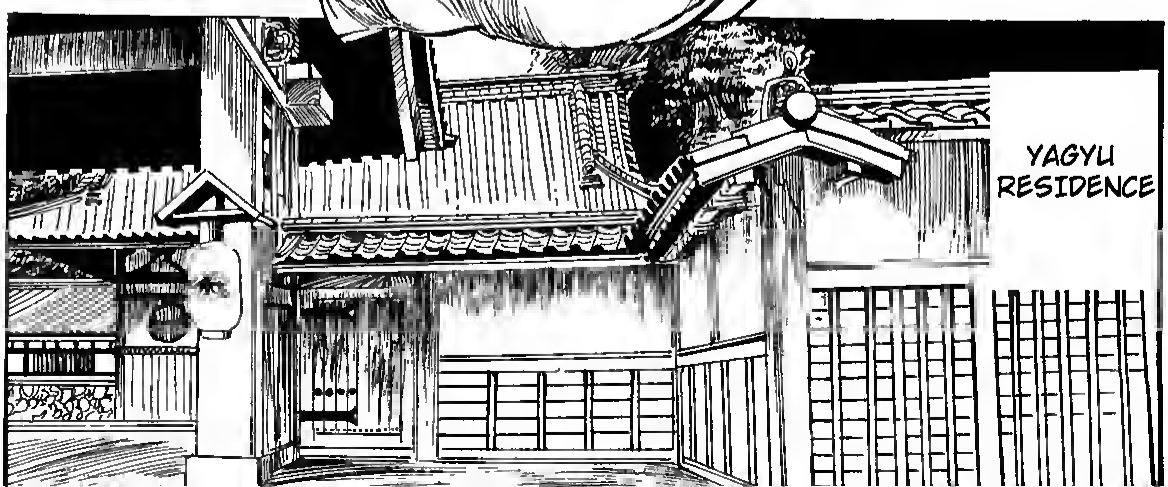
M-MOTHER
...
CUT ME UP UNTIL YOU'RE SATISFIED.
NOOO!
侠仁

SHHHWSHH
TAP
I WILL TAKE THIS INSTEAD.

WAS SEIKICHI.
THE BIGGEST VICTIM OF THIS CONSPIRACY AGAINST ME...
AND PLACE IT ON YOUR SON'S GRAVE FOR ME.
TAKE THIS BEAUTIFULLY RADIANT JADE...



M-MOTHER ...!
THANK THE HEAVENS ...


YAGYU RESIDENCE

HMM MM...
COUGH
IT SEEMS THAT THE PLAN BACKFIRED. TOSHIKANE'S EVEN MORE FAMOUS NOW THAN... *COUGH*!
HE'S BEEN ELEVATED FURTHER ...
MORE IMPORTANTLY, HIS "FENCES WITHIN FENCES" IS QUITE A DANGEROUS THING.
THAT BOY IS A TRULY TERRIFYING GENIUS.
IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND ORDER WE CANNOT ALLOW HIM TO LIVE.

●「第十二話」完●

CHAPTER 12 - FIN

CHAPTER 13: "THE MOON ON THE WATER" ATOP OF THE BRIDGE

『第十三話』橋上の水月

FATH-
ER.
YAGYU RESIDENCE
FATHER, I'VE HEARD YOU'VE BEEN CHECKING UP ON THE MOVE-MENTS ...
AND DAILY ROUTINES OF THAT TOSHIKANE* OF THE OWARI YAGYU.
FATHER, SURELY YOU'RE NOT THINKING ...
OF GOING AGAINST TOSHIKANE YOURSELF ...
HAHA... NOT IN MY POOR HEALTH.
COUGH

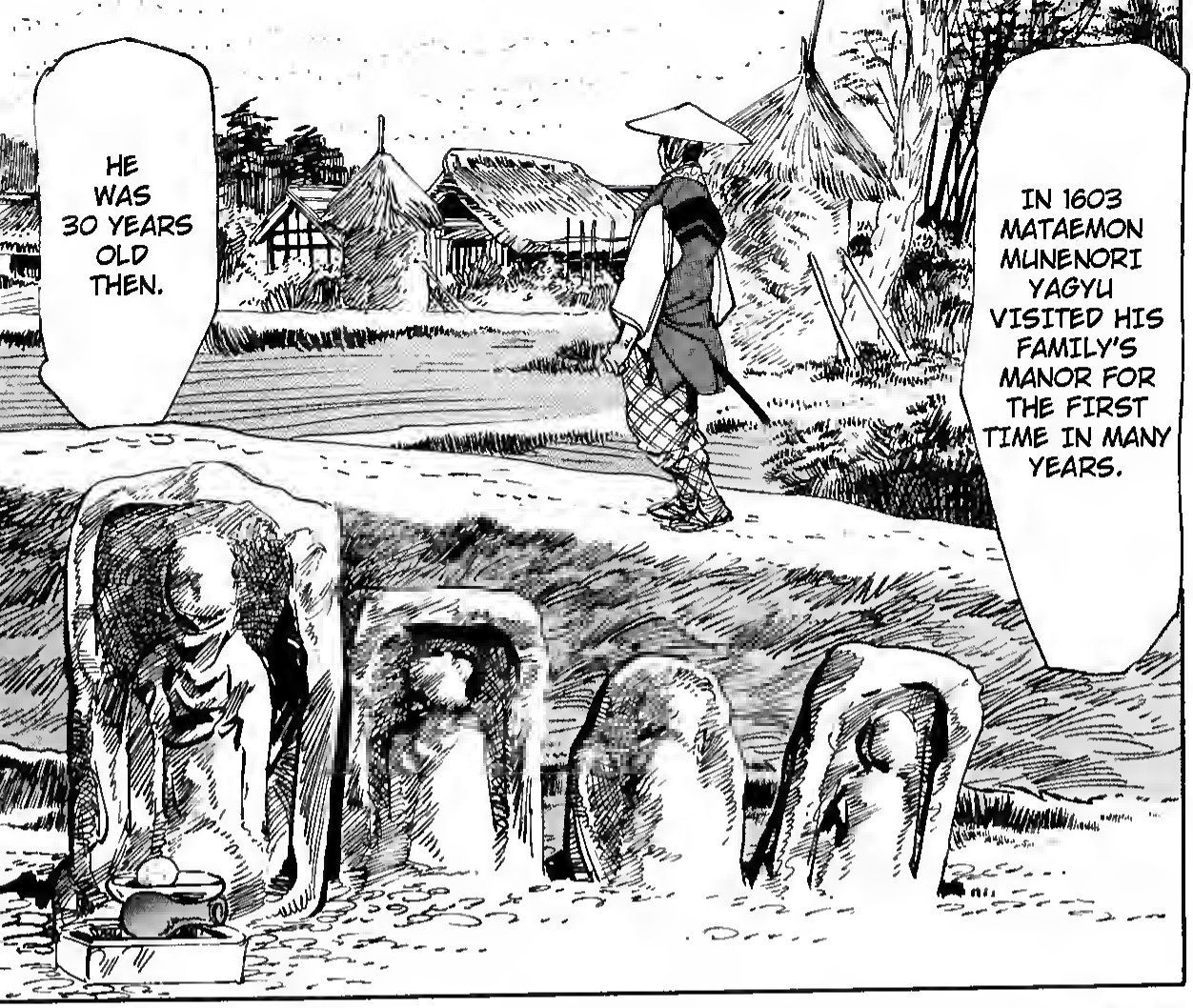
* LATER KNOWN AS RENYASAI

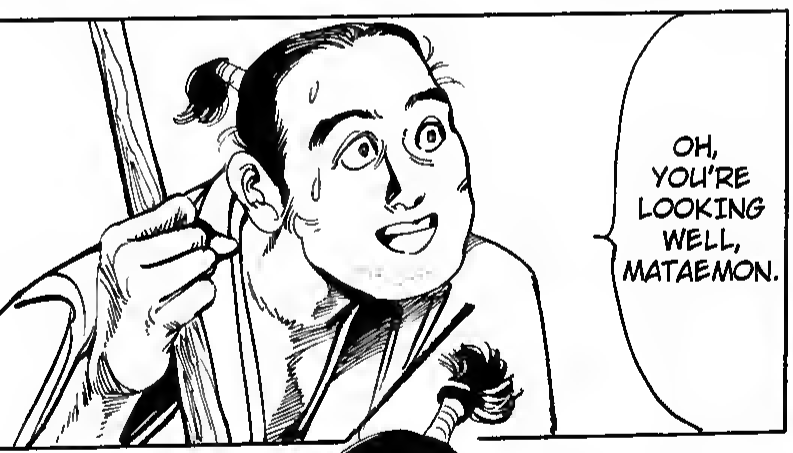
HMPH.
YOU'RE A POWERFUL LORD, FATHER. PLEASE DO NOT ACT THIS CARE-LESSLY ...
I WAS JUST CURIOUS WHAT KIND OF A MAN HE IS.
IT'S JUST... EVEN THOUGH WE MUST HUNT HIM DOWN TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND ORDER, HE IS STILL A YAGYU...
BUT BOY WAS THAT SOME STORM YESTERDAY.
THE WEATHER'S CLEARING... RAIN'S TURNED TO DRIZZLE.
ONCE A MONTH TOSHIKANE STAYS THE DAY IN KAWASAKI, GIVING SWORD LESSONS AT THE BISHU SHOP.
ONE DAY ON HIS WAY BACK ...

DID YOU KNOW THAT FOOTMEN ACROSS EDO ARE SAYING THAT YOU'RE THE STRONGEST IN ALL OF JAPAN?
AND THAT YOU'RE A PARAGON OF SAMURAI VIRTUES?
THAT'S REALLY TOO MUCH PRAISE.
I'M ALWAYS HAPPY TO ACCOMPANY YOU, MASTER.
BUT NO MATTER THE WEATHER ...
!

KLINK
WHEN A SAMURAI ON HORSEBACK PASSES BY A SAMURAI ON FOOT, IT'S COMMON ETIQUETTE FOR THE RIDER TO SHOW THAT HE HAS NO "ILL INTENTIONS" BY REMOVING HIS FEET FROM THE STIRRUPS.
THANK YOU, SIR.

LIKE TWO PEAS IN A POD!
HE LOOKS JUST LIKE MY FATHER, SEKISHUSAI, WHEN HE WAS YOUNG!


IN 1603 MATAEMON MUNENORI YAGYU VISITED HIS FAMILY'S MANOR FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY YEARS.
HE WAS 30 YEARS OLD THEN.

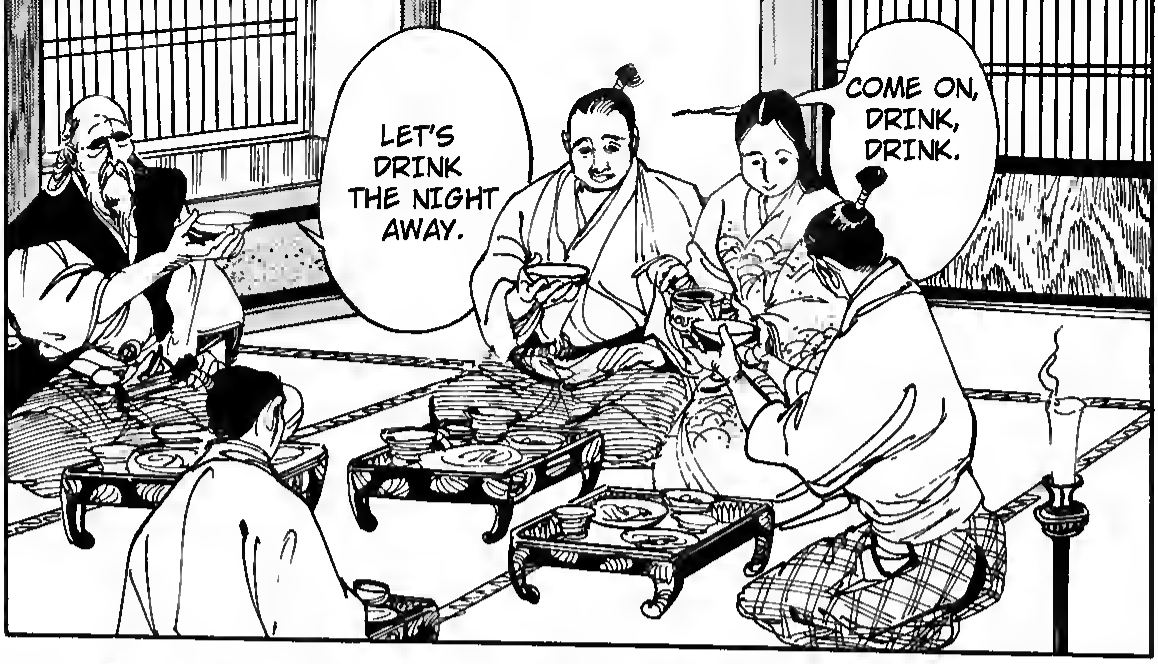

OH, YOU'RE LOOKING WELL, MATAEMON.

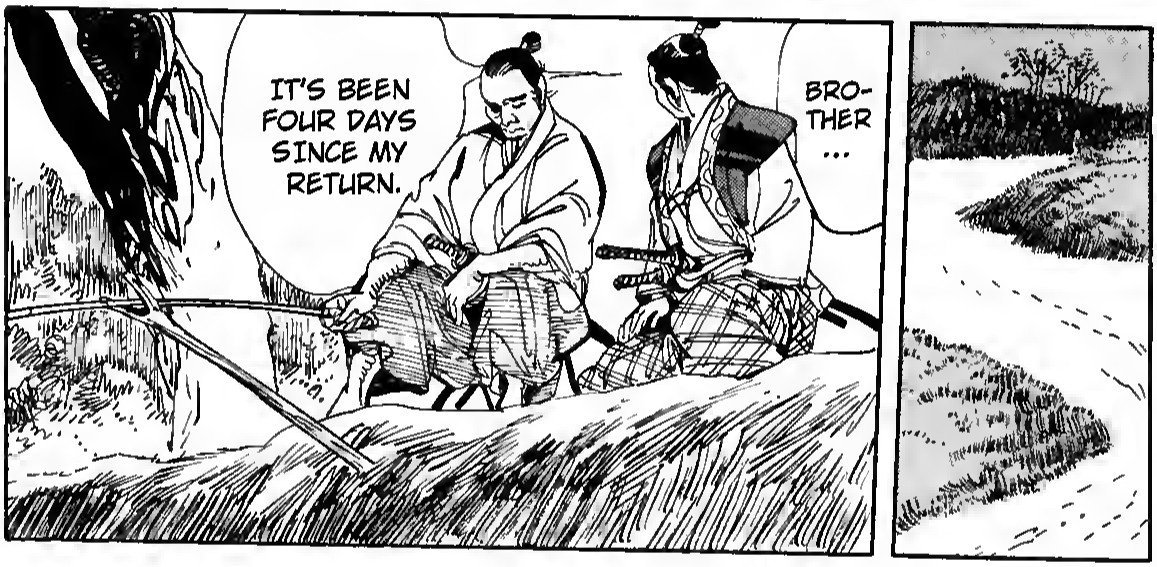
YOU'RE ALSO LOOKING WELL, OLDER BROTHER.

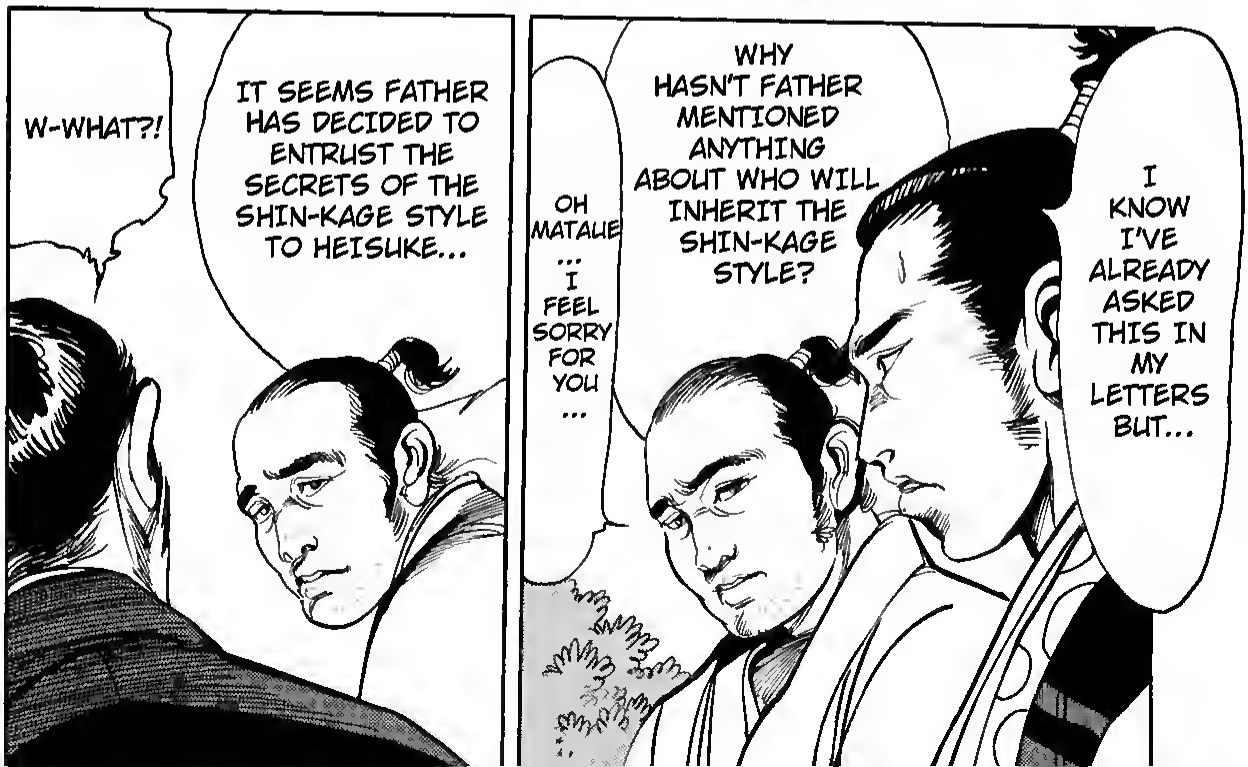
SWOOM
SWOOM

YOU'RE KIND TO SAY THAT... BUT I'VE BEEN IN THIS PITIFUL STATE EVER SINCE I HAD MY HIPBONE SHATTERED BY AN ENEMY BULLET AT AGE 20.
I'M JUST A USELESS MOUTH HERE AT THE YAGYU MANOR.
BUT YOU ARE DOING PRETTY WELL. SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE TOKUGAWA ...
THAT'S AMAZING.
...
I'M VERY PLEASED ...
TO FIND YOU IN GOOD HEALTH, FATHER.
HMPH.
YOU'VE SPENT TOO MUCH TIME WITH THE SHOGUN WHO'S BROUGHT THE COUNTRY'S WARLORDS UNDER HIS CONTROL. YOU SEEM NERVOUSNESS.
THIS IS YOUR HOME. HERE YOU SHOULD BE RELAXED AND AT EASE.

YES.
THE MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS I'VE SEEN ON THE WAY HERE... THIS VERY MANSION... IT'S ALL VERY NOSTALGIC.
BY THE WAY, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO MY GRANDSON, HEISUKE.
ENTER, HEISUKE.
UNCLE, I'M YOUR NEPHEW HEISUKE.
OH MY, YOU'VE ALREADY GROWN THIS BIG.
IS IT TRUE WHAT THEY SAY? THAT DESPITE BEING THE YOUNGEST ONE ...
YOU ARE THE MOST SKILLED SWORDSMAN AMONG MY BROTHER'S CHILDREN?
THE FUTURE OWARI SWORD INSTRUCTOR HYOGONOSUKE YAGYU (TOSHIKANE'S FATHER)


LET'S DRINK THE NIGHT AWAY.
COME ON, DRINK, DRINK.


IT'S BEEN FOUR DAYS SINCE MY RETURN.
BRO-THER ...


W-WHAT?!
IT SEEMS FATHER HAS DECIDED TO ENTRUST THE SECRETS OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE TO HEISUKE...
OH MATAUE ... I FEEL SORRY FOR YOU ...
WHY HASN'T FATHER MENTIONED ANYTHING ABOUT WHO WILL INHERIT THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE?
I KNOW I'VE ALREADY ASKED THIS IN MY LETTERS BUT...

I'VE SPENT YEARS GETTING BACK THE LANDS STOLEN FROM THE YAGYU CLAN BY ALL KINDS OF POWERFUL WARLORDS!
YES, YOU HAVE.
USING THE AUTHORITY OF THE TOKUGAWA YOU'VE RETURNED OUR ANCESTRAL LANDS TO US
BUT... AREN'T THEY ALL IN YOUR NAME NOW?
NOT ALL - ONLY 1,000 KOKU.* THE REMAINING 2,000 KOKU ARE IN FATHER'S NAME.
ONLY AS LONG AS HE'S ALIVE.
WHEN FATHER DIES, IT WILL ALL BE YOURS, WON'T IT ...?
...
I AM A SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE SHOGUN! WHO'S BETTER SUITED TO PROPAGATE THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE THAN ME?!
GIVE UP, MATAIE ...
FATHER ...
FAVORS HIS GRANDSON OVER ME, HIS OWN SON...

* KOKU: A JAPANESE VOLUME MEASUREMENT UNIT. IN THE EDO PERIOD USED TO INDICATE THE STIPENDS AND DOMAINS OF NOBILITY AND SAMURAI.

MATAHE... YOU'RE A DIRECT RETAINER OF THE SHOGUN. YOU EARN 4,000 KOKU...
WHILE HEISUKE IS THE SON OF A DISGRACED SAMURAI. FATHER PROBABLY CONSIDERED THAT WHEN DECIDING...
BROTHER! I AM A SWORD INSTRUCTOR TO THE SHOGUN! EVEN ALL THE LORDS AND CABINET OFFICIALS ...
BELIEVE THAT I OBVIOUSLY MUST INHERIT THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE!
NO.
THE ONE WHO WILL INHERIT THE MARTIAL ART I LEARNED FROM MASTER KAMIIZUMI AND LATER REFINED...
WILL BE HEISUKE.
I HAVE ALSO LEARNED IT FROM YOU, FATHER.
THEREFORE, FIRST MAKE ME THE THIRD SUCCESSOR AND THEN HEISUKE CAN BE THE FOURTH ONE AFTER ME!

MATA-HE.
SHOW ME YOUR FORM ...
YEH!
TMP!
FWWSHH
THWAK!

TO CARRY ON THE TEACHINGS OF MASTER NOBUTSUNA.
I CAN SEE THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER STYLES IN YOUR MARTIAL ART.
YOU WERE AWAY FROM HOME FOR A LONG TIME.
IT IS MORE BEFITTING FOR HEISUKE...
"YAGYU SHIN-KAGE."
YOU'VE NEVER PRACTICED THE TRUE SHIN-KAGE, BUT RATHER ITS BRANCH...
SHING!
FATHER?!
T-THEN DOES THAT MEAN I CANNOT EVEN USE THE NAME "SHIN-KAGE"?!

OF THE SWORDS-MAN INSIDE HIS OWN FATHER.
THAT DAY, MUNENORI SAW THE RUTHLESS-NESS, SOME MIGHT EVEN SAY CRUELTY ...
I WAS ONLY STOPPED BY MY OWN REASON AND A RESOLVE TO CREATE A SWORD STYLE THAT WOULD SURPASS FATHER'S SHIN-KAGE.
I FELT THE URGE TO KILL MY FATHER RIGHT THERE AND THEN.
SSSSSH
WHAT IS A SWORDSMAN TO DO...?
AND YET, ONCE AGAIN THE "SHIN-KAGE" STANDS IN OUR WAY, THIS TIME IN FRONT OF MY SON MUNEFUYU.
THAT'S WHY, WHENEVER I TOOK A BREAK FROM POLITICS, I DEVOTED MYSELF ENTIRELY TO MY SWORD.

IS THAT YOU, KENBEI?
YES ...
I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO STAY AWAY ...
YES.
NEEEIGH
TOSHIKANE SHOULD HAVE ARRIVED IN EDO BY NOW...
I WOULDN'T WANT TO ENCOUNTER HIM AGAIN...
BUT TAJIMA-NO-KAMI AND TOSHIKANE DID MEET AGAIN, AT THE FORK OF THE TAMA RIVER.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I CAME HERE...
TAT TAT

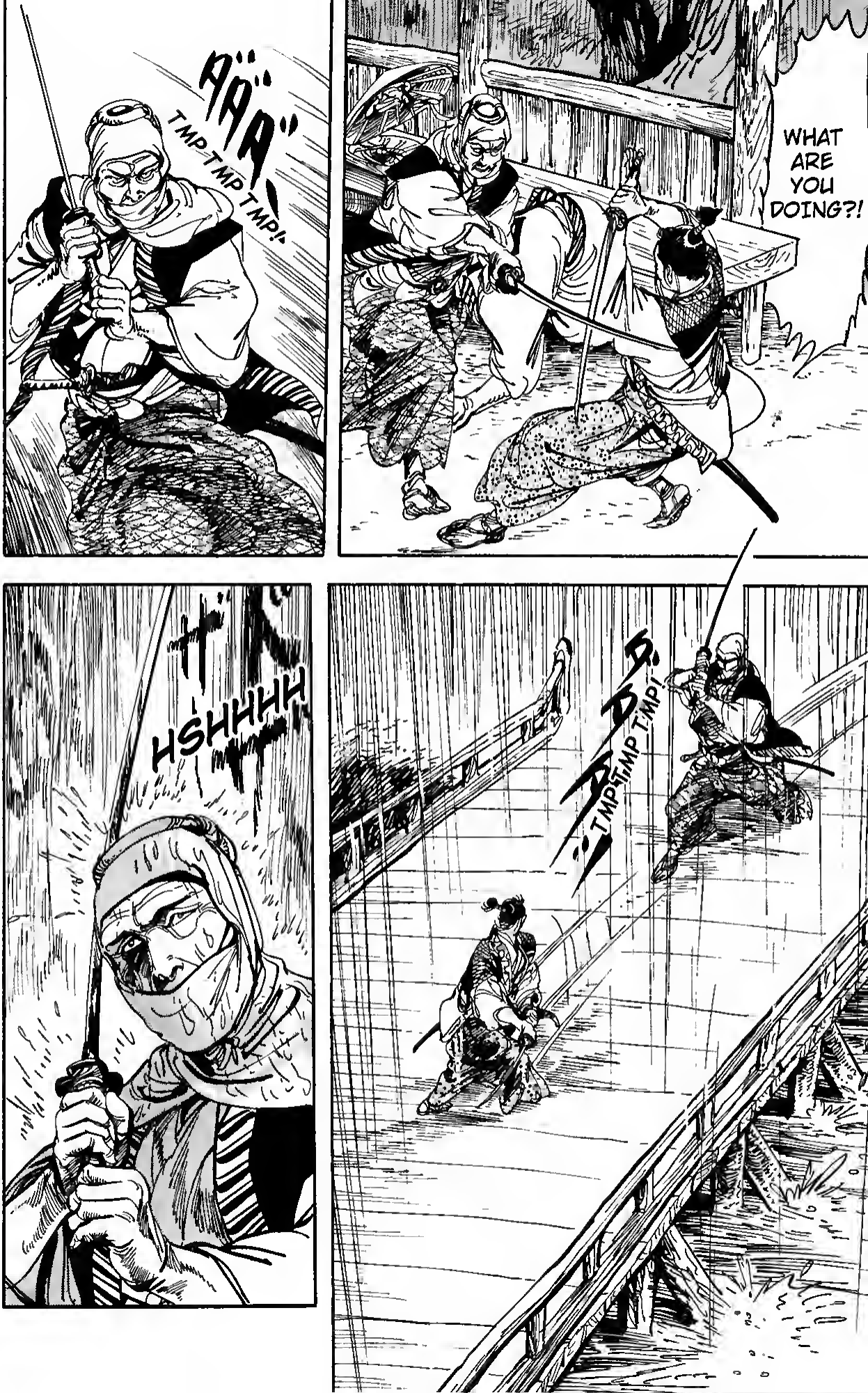
ドドド
THDT THDT
THE WATER LEVELS HAVE RISEN AFTER YESTERDAY'S STORM, MAKING THE BRIDGE SWAY DANGEROUSLY.
IT SHOULD BE SAFE TO CROSS IN A LITTLE WHILE.

PLEASE WAIT WITH US.
IN THE MEAN-TIME ...
DRIP
FLASH
RUSTLE
RUMBLE
OH DEAR... THE RAIN'S PICKED UP AGAIN ...
HSHHHHHH
...

RETURNING FROM KAWASAKI.
YOU ARE ...
HMPH ...
WE HAVE MET IN THE AFTERNOON NEAR MARUKO HILL.
SAGAWA SHIN-KAGE ETC...
THERE ARE MANY BRANCHES OF THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE LIKE MATSUDA SHIN-KAGE, NODA SHIN-KAGE ...
A LITTLE BIT OF SHIN-KAGE ...
WENT TO KAWASAKI TO TEACH KENJUTSU.
MASTER HERE ...
OH? WHAT STYLE...?
IT'S WHY THEY CALL IT "YAGYU SHIN-KAGE."
THAT'S ALSO NOT THE TRUE STYLE.
OH YES, DON'T THE TOKUGAWA SUPPORT THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE ...?

.....
IT'S REALLY NOTHING LIKE THE REAL THING!
FLASH
RUMBLE
YOU'VE NEVER PRACTICED THE TRUE SHIN-KAGE!

?
BUT RATHER ITS BRANCH — "YAGYU SHIN-KAGE"!


AAA"
TMP TMP TMP!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
HSHHHH
TMP TMP TMP!

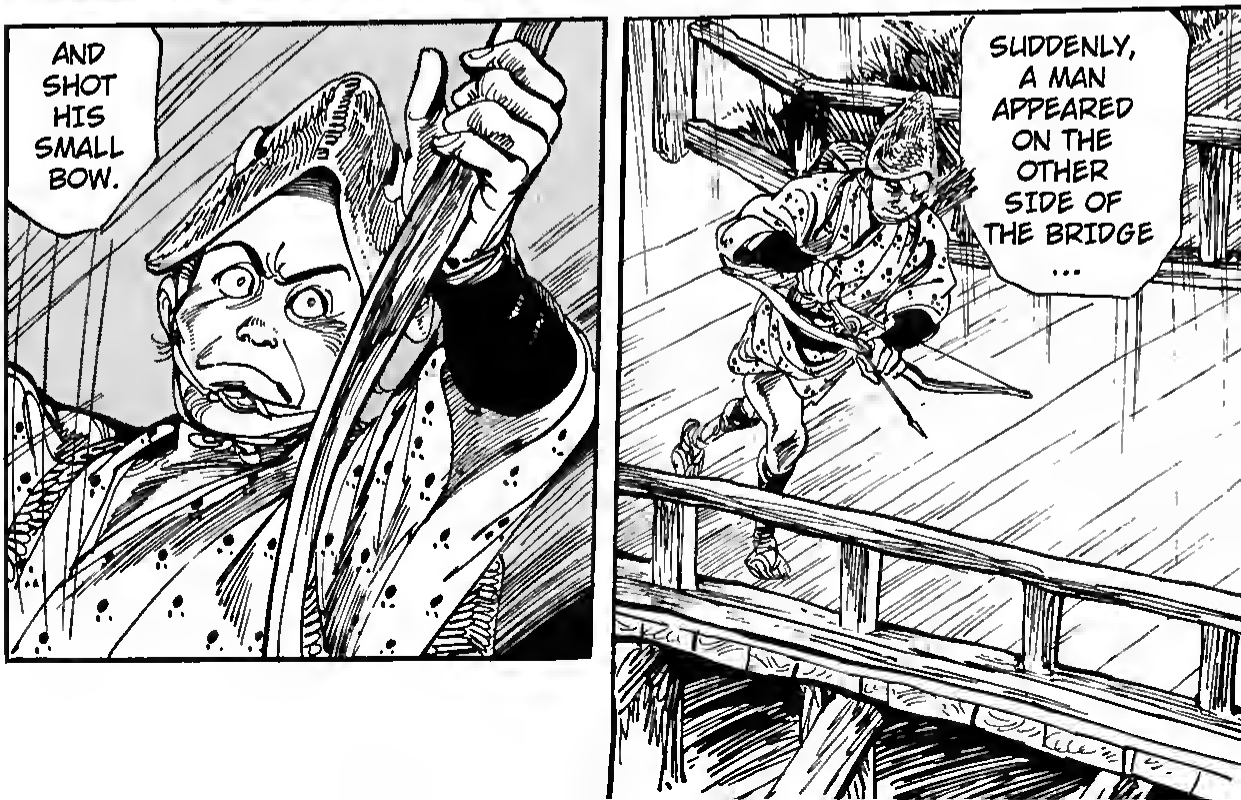
RENYA WAS FORCED TO RETREAT.
THE OLD WARRIOR HAD NO OPENINGS.
VSHHHHHMM
IN THAT CASE, ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS TO FIGHT TO THE VERY END.
RUMBLE
RENYA UNDER-STOOD THAT HE MIGHT DIE THAT DAY.
HIS STANCE MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR RENYA TO THROW THE FIRST BLOW.
FLASH
THAT IS THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE'S "MOON ON THE WATER" – A STATE OF MIND AS QUIET AND FLUID AS THE MOONLIGHT REFLECTING IN THE WATER.
ONCE HE FORWENT HIS ATTACHMENT TO LIFE, RENYA'S HEART BECAME AS CALM AS MOONLIGHT REFLECTING ON THE SURFACE OF A MOUNTAIN LAKE.

THE OLD WARRIOR ALSO STOPPED ...
YEEEEEEH!!
WOOOOOOH!

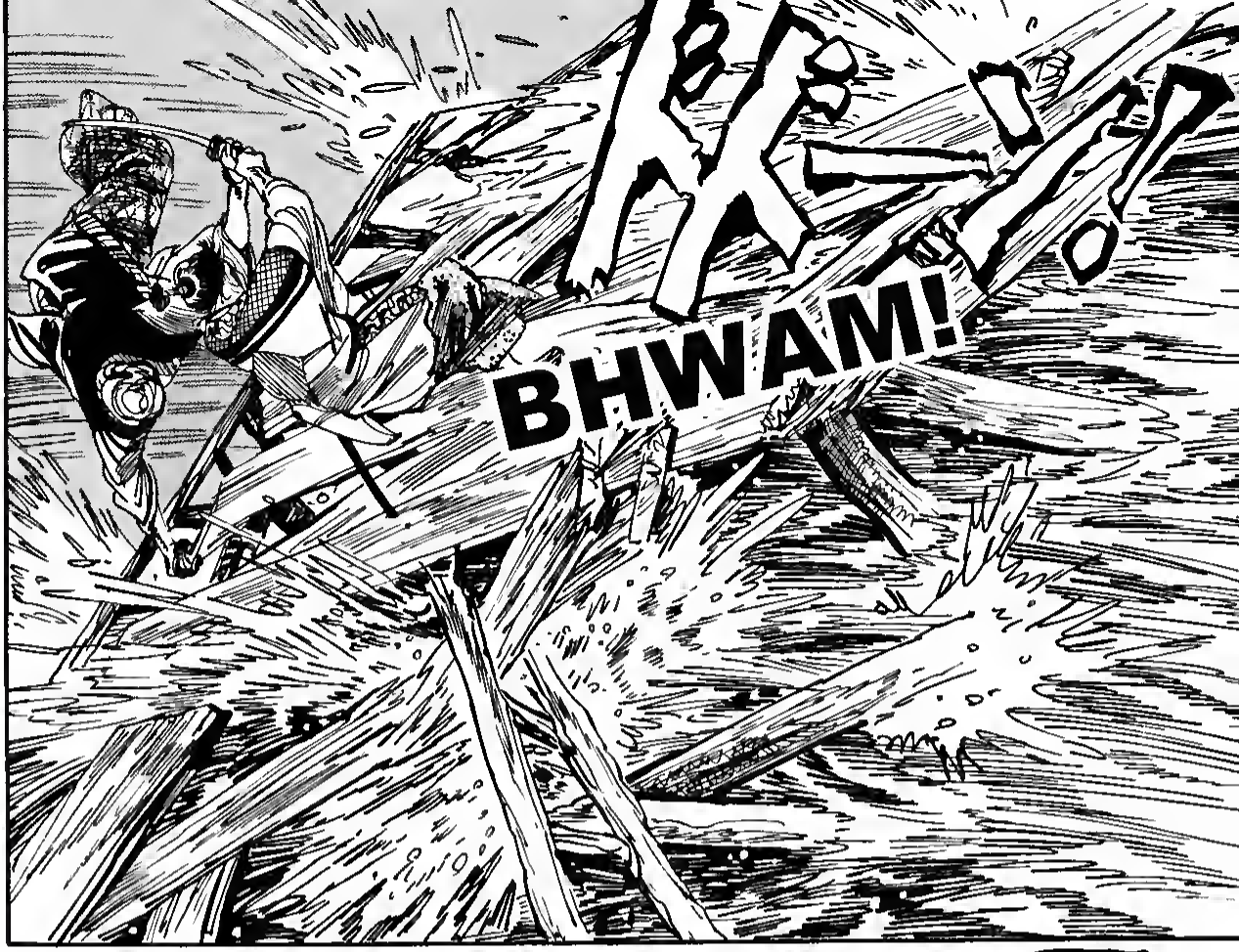
ONE HOUR HAS PASSED WITH BOTH OF THEM TRYING TO READ THE OTHER ONE'S HEART.
THWUMP!!
LIKE TWO WILD BEASTS, THE WARRIORS CHANTED THEIR BATTLE CRIES.
FOR SOME REASON, SIGNS OF STRAIN BEGAN TO APPEAR ON THE WARRIOR'S FACE.
COUGH

FFFWSH

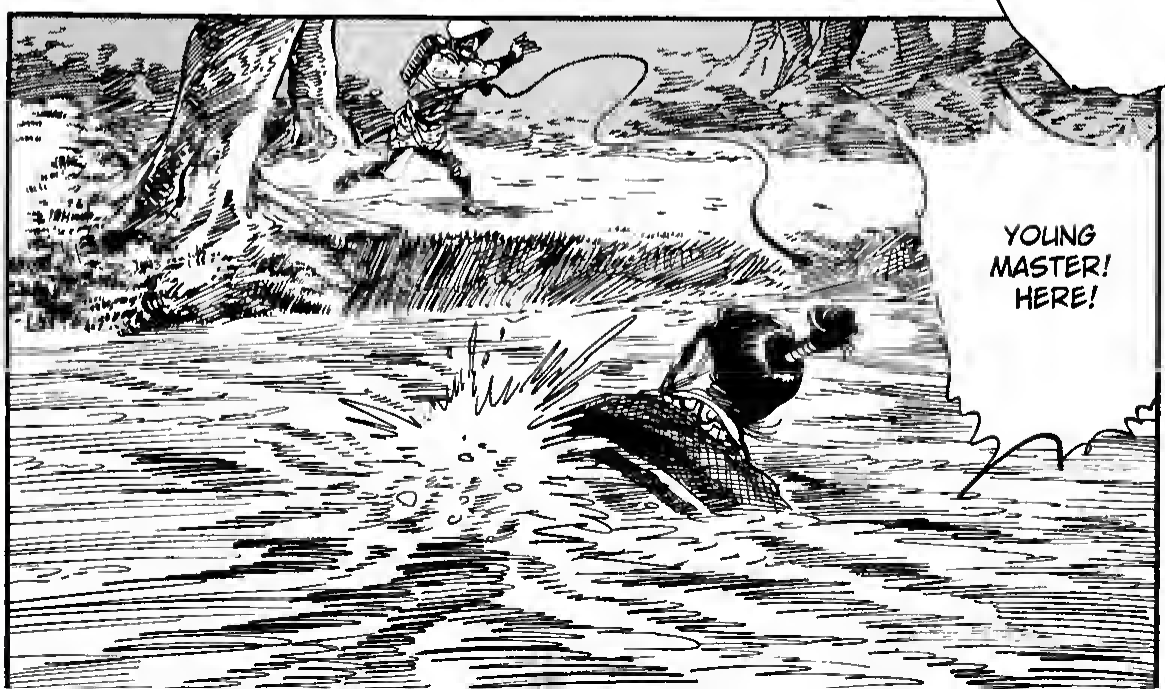
CAUSED RENYA TO LOSE HIS BALANCE.
THE ENEMY'S SUDDEN ATTACK ...


AND SHOT HIS SMALL BOW.
SUDDENLY, A MAN APPEARED ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE ...

WITH ONE OF THEM HITTING THE ASSASSIN.
THE NINJA ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE BRIDGE DIDN'T SEE THE OTHER MAN.
THEN TWO ARROWS FLEW ABOVE RENYA'S SHOULDER...
CRASH
CRASH

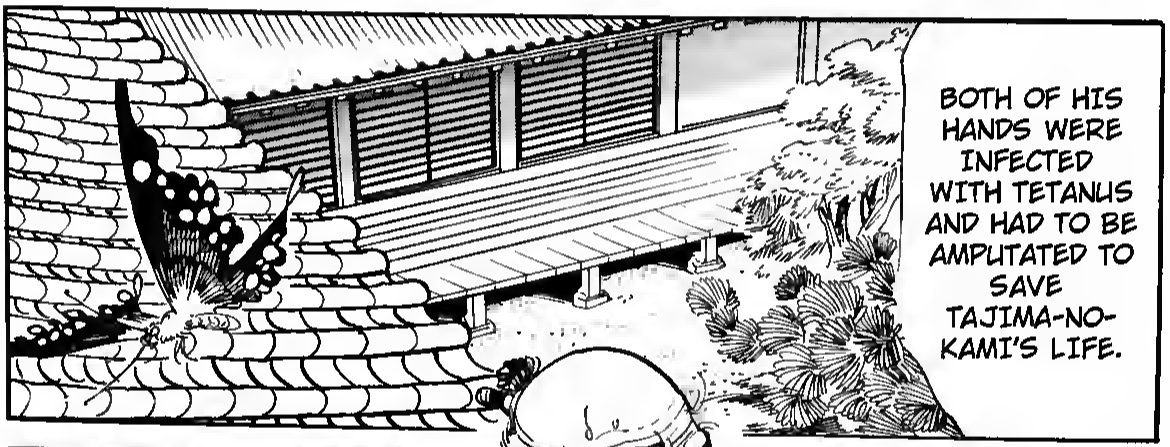

BHWAM!

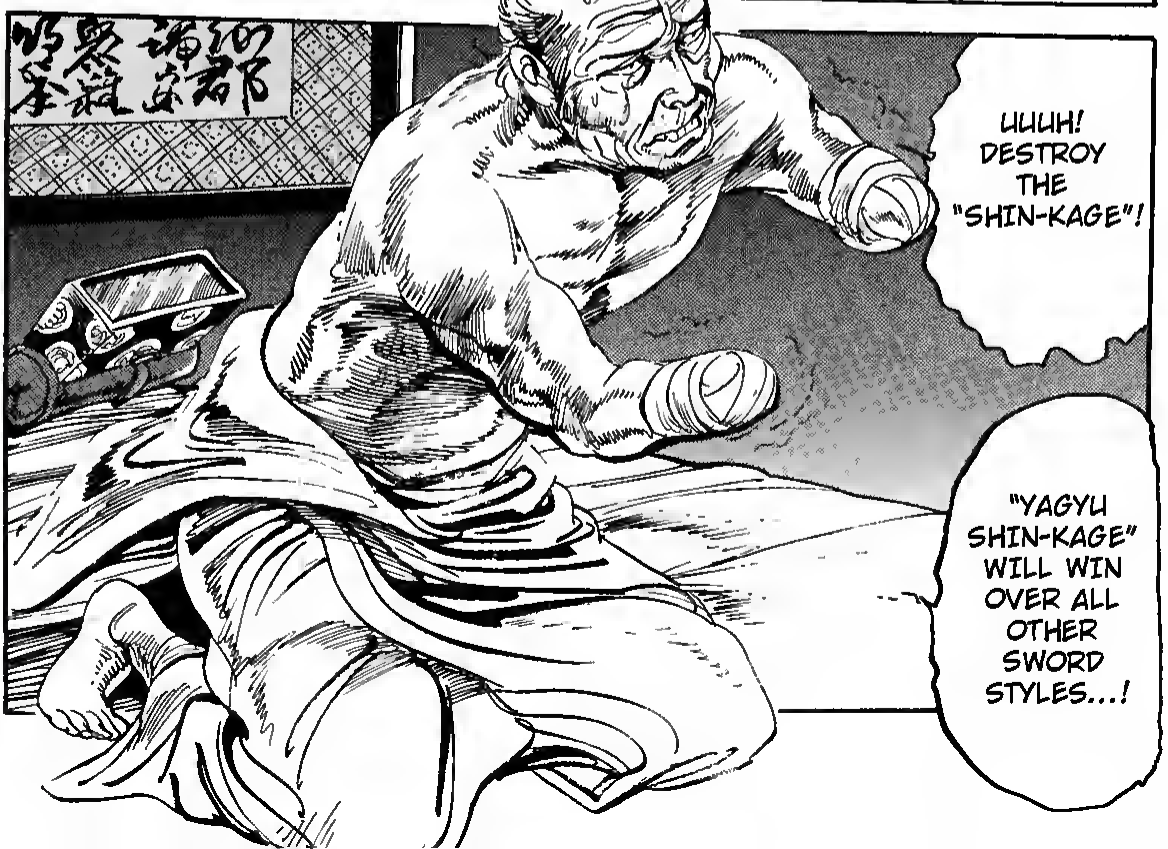
THE TWO WARRIORS WERE SWEPT BY THE VIOLENT CURRENT.

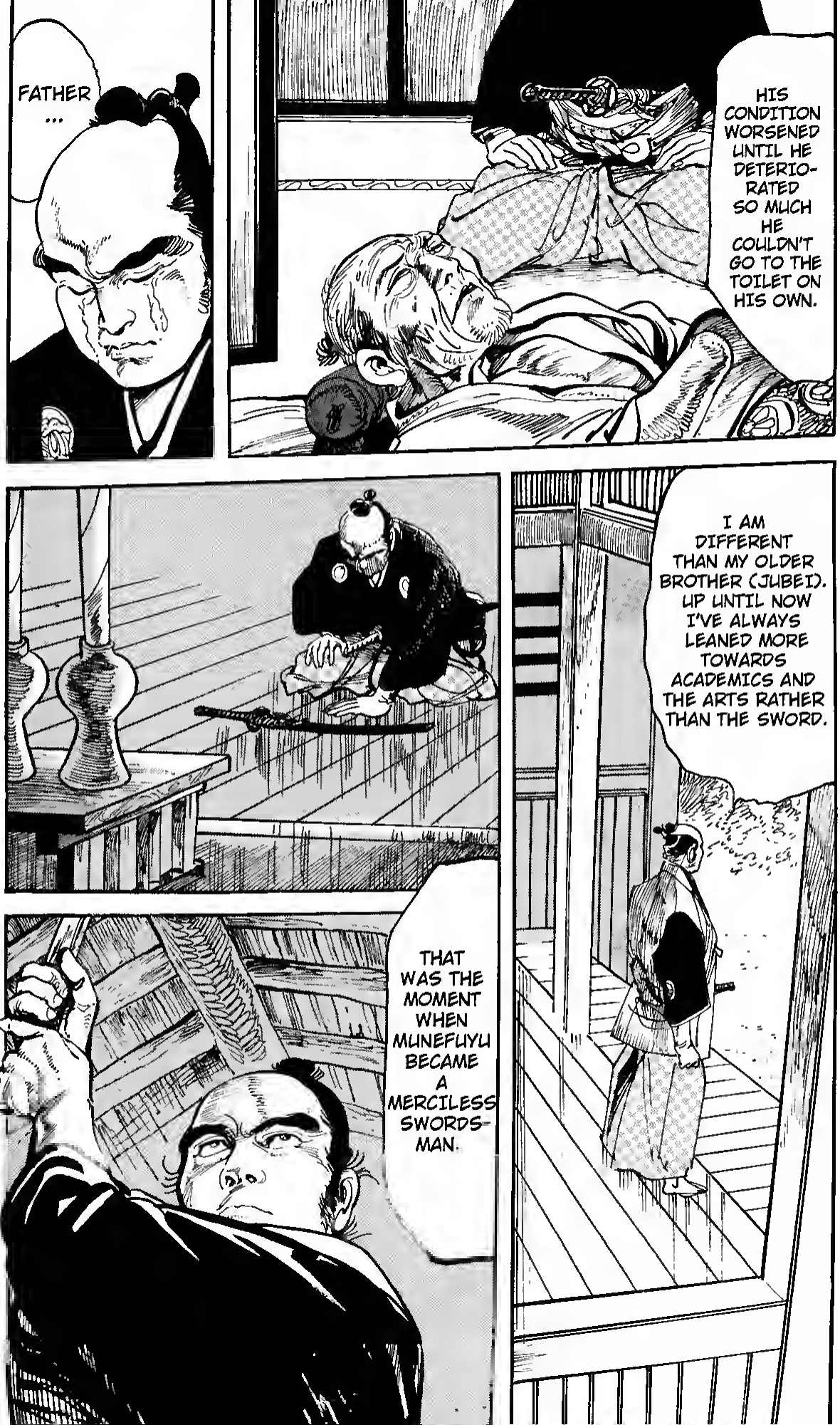

YOUNG MASTER! HERE!

THE FOLLOWING DAY, EDO YAGYU MEN FOUND TAJIMA-NO-KAMI WHO HAD BEEN CARRIED AWAY BY THE TAMA RIVER MAIN STREAM.
RECENT-LY SOME-ONE'S BEEN TRYING TO TARGET YOU, YOUNG MASTER SO...
WELL ...
YOU CAME FOR ME, GEN-PACHI.
I WILL NOT DIE BECAUSE OF HIM...!

LORD!!
UUH ...
THE MEN RESCUED HIM BUT HIS BODY WAS ALL RIGID AND COVERED WITH DRIFTWOOD WOUNDS.


BOTH OF HIS HANDS WERE INFECTED WITH TETANUS AND HAD TO BE AMPUTATED TO SAVE TAJIMA-NO-KAMI'S LIFE.


UUUH! DESTROY THE "SHIN-KAGE"!
"YAGYU SHIN-KAGE" WILL WIN OVER ALL OTHER SWORD STYLES...!


FATHER ...
HIS CONDITION WORSENED UNTIL HE DETERIO-RATED SO MUCH HE COULDN'T GO TO THE TOILET ON HIS OWN.
I AM DIFFERENT THAN MY OLDER BROTHER (JUBEI). UP UNTIL NOW I'VE ALWAYS LEANED MORE TOWARDS ACADEMICS AND THE ARTS RATHER THAN THE SWORD.
THAT WAS THE MOMENT WHEN MUNEFUYU BECAME A MERCILESS SWORDS-MAN.

I SHALL BECOME THE "MOON ON THE WATER."
MY HEART WILL RESEMBLE THE MOON REFLECTING IN THE WATER. MY FORM WILL BE LIKE A SHADOW UPON A MIRROR.
HUH?! THE SHIN-KAGE STYLE ...?
HIS SWORD-PLAY WAS VERY SIMILAR TO MY FATHER'S.
YOUNG MASTER ...
IF WE CONSIDER THAT HE WAS OLDER THAN 70, THEN PERHAPS THAT WARRIOR ...
WAS THE EDO YAGYU ...
W... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
YOU KNOW SUCH A THING IS IMPOSSIBLE.
HAHA.. I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT, YOUNG MASTER!
CHAPTER 13 - FIN

●【第十三話】完●

SP COMICS

YAGYU RENYA, LEGEND OF THE SWORD MASTER VOLUME 2

柳生烈伝 2

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